

**The Write Rationale**  
Teaching and Assessing Writing in English Home  
Language in the Senior Phase

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Father God, may everything that I have learned here not puff me up with pride but prepare my mind, heart and hands to serve the children whom You love. May I never forget that each one is Yours.

# Abstract

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*The National Curriculum Statement is the most substantive document framing how English teachers are expected to teach writing in English Home Language in the Senior Phase. However, when its implicit pedagogy is evaluated according to what five decades of research and theory have confirmed as best practice, it is found wanting. This is largely due to its foundation in outcomes-based education, an educational philosophy that asserts that all meaningful learning can and must be expressed in objective, measurable terms. This positivist assumption is intrinsically at odds with how writing should be taught. Writing is both imaginative and social. Writing is imaginative in that it draws on non-rational faculties such as intuition, aesthetic sensibility and discernment as much as – if not more than – rational logical thought; writing resists reduction to measurable components. Writing is social in that to teach writing is to introduce and integrate student writers into a broader community of writers and writing. A content-driven writing pedagogy does not support the high level of interaction required between student and teacher. An alternative writing curriculum is proposed here, one that is based upon the best thinking and practice to emerge out of a long and continuing debate about how to teach writing.*

# Introduction

## Chapter 1

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I loved writing at school. Without fail, I looked forward to those moments when my English teachers would announce a writing activity. My stories were predictable, invariably about some heroic figure overcoming villainous odds, but I loved writing them. I can still remember getting up early on a Saturday morning to use my father's new typewriter to start a story that I never finished. It was about a man with a dog and a cabin in some foggy woods. Although some peril was bearing down on him, he did not know it and I never got round to writing that peril in. He, the dog and the yellowing forest still exist in a suspended animation in my mind. I may never finish that story, but of late I have found myself returning frequently to that setting and that mood, normally just before I sleep. No one had to tell me to write – I wanted to.

And then I grew up and became an English teacher.

In among teaching my students grammar and literature, I was expected to have them write. I needed to find occasion for them to put pen to paper in a way that they might find worthwhile and which would yield something for me to mark. Questions about relevance, enjoyment and accuracy have surfaced disturbingly throughout the almost nine years I have been teaching. I have been haunted by a sense that I don't really know what I am doing, that somehow I am perpetuating a kind of fraud with irrelevant writing activities and inadequate teaching. Much of the problem is that I still don't understand why anyone *wouldn't* want to write. Surely, if given the slightest excuse to exercise their imaginations on paper, students would seize the opportunity and write something – anything!

My default mode of teaching writing is to give what I think to be a reasonable excuse for writing and to suppress whatever forces are contrary to an environment of sustained, focused writing. The problem with this is that innate

pleasure gives way to external control as I baffle my way through a cobbled-together methodology. And then no one is having fun.

Of course, this feeling is not unique to teaching writing. The pleasure and power of the things I have always loved about English as a school and university subject so often feel like Bilbo Baggins's butter spread thinly over too much bread. This intangible entity that I love feels frequently like a cudgel with which I beat who-knows-what into my students' heads and onto their examination papers.

This thesis is an attempt to reclaim a joy for both myself and my students. As a teacher, my gratification in writing is inextricably linked to theirs. The research behind this thesis aimed to understand better how I might meaningfully convey the pleasure and power of writing to my students. I have gone back to the origins of writing in English as a school subject and traced its development in academic theory, government publications and classrooms to the present. I have read closely what the National Curriculum Statement of South Africa has to say about writing, focusing on Home Language in the Senior Phase. This curriculum in its current revision – the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement – stands as a statement for what government and the public expect should happen when writing is taught in schools, and is the informing text for English teachers new to the profession. My conclusion is that what the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement says about how writing should be taught is fundamentally wrong. It is founded on an educational philosophy that is inimical to meaningful writing and the teaching of meaningful writing. It is not informed by the best ideas to have emerged out of a long history of teaching writing and instead falls back on a sterile, content-driven approach that does little to inspire pleasure and power in writing.

The culmination of this study is a curriculum that is based on these best ideas. It is the writing curriculum I wish I had received as a new teacher. It presents a rationale for writing and practical suggestions for how this might be expressed in a classroom. It rests on the assumption that it is insightful, patient and passionate teachers and not curricula that provide the best opportunity for

student writers to develop towards being mature writers. The curriculum lays a foundation for teaching writing; it is not the substance of teaching writing.

University of Cape Town

# The British legacy

## Chapter 2

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### Lineage

My wife, Claire, and I had the privilege of being able to travel Southeast Asia and China for five months in 2009. One of the most memorable legs of our travel was the month we spent backpacking through China. In addition to a disguised copy of *Lonely Planet China*, Claire had also sourced a copy of Jung Chan's *Wild Swans: Three daughters of China*, which we both read before we entered China from Laos. It is an autobiographical account of three generations of Chinese women set against the backdrop of the massive social, cultural and political changes that defined the twentieth century for China. Both *Lonely Planet* and *Wild Swans* gave us a sense of the country before we even stepped foot in it and enhanced our appreciation for what we were going to experience.

One of the most poignant illustrations of this was in the Temple of Heaven Park in Beijing. There was a group of nine people playing harmonica, a group of people dancing ballroom (and just about everything else), and a group of about a hundred people singing along to a brass band. The park was bursting with creative expression. There was a marvellous lack of self-consciousness about it all. I wondered – and still do – to what extent such public displays of entertainment and enjoyment were fuelled by the memory of the cultural repression of Mao Zedong's reign. The majority of those making music, at least, were elderly and must have lived through those times. Was it not possible that the joy of simply being able to sing, dance or play harmonica publicly was augmented by the recollection that such activities were once banned?

As an English teacher, I arrived in the profession knowing that I wanted to teach English but without any meaningful understanding of what the subject had gone through historically to make it what it was in that present. Now, like a tourist in China, I have had to read up on the lineage of my current reality in order to

understand why it is the way it is and so discern what is expected of me in the present. For the purpose of this study, I need to discuss English the Subject in order to discuss properly writing as an activity in it.

The place I wish to start this discussion is Britain, to trace the history of English the Subject back to its origin. There are at least two reasons for this. First, much of what we practise in South African schools can trace its roots back to British schooling. We have received much of our pedagogy and philosophy of assessment from the British. Second, many of the issues that arise when considering English education in South Africa have been raised and discussed at length within the British context. Crucially, English in England is a discussion of *home language*, the object of this study.

### **From the Education Acts to The Great Tradition**

Some time before a succession of Education Acts in the late 1800s and early 1900s established English as a compulsory state school subject, it had started to take shape as an object of study in church-run schools (Routledge, n.d.) and extra-university societies, which were divided between linguistic and literary concerns (Burgess and Hardcastle, 2000). In the latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century, English sought to establish its legitimacy as an academic pursuit by modelling itself on Classical study (Goodwyn and Branson, 2005, Burgess and Hardcastle, 2000) and took on different identities in universities and schools respectively. In universities, the motivation was 'to evolve a serious and coherent set of studies from the disparate literary and linguistic aims within the philological project' (Burgess and Hardcastle, 2000). In schools, a similar distinction between literature and language was present, but for reasons quite apart from those of high academia. Simply put, the increasing industrialisation of England required a more literate and better trained workforce. Language studies meant basic literacy, which meant more skills and greater productivity. The role of literature, as will be discussed shortly, had more to do with character and culture.

Modelled as it was on the Classics, this study of the English language promoted a highly technical approach to grammar. Writing was limited to 'exercises in prosody or dubiously utilitarian tasks' (Paffard, 1978:15). In this respect, a major focus of school English in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was on what both Dixon (1967) and Thompson (1969) call 'skills'. This skills-based approach can be traced back to the productivity rationale of industrialisation. Education needed to prepare the population to further the aims of mass production and the role that English had to play was to achieve functional levels of literacy.

Even as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold lamented what he saw as the surrender of the finest values of spiritual faith and social conscience to the dehumanising industrialisation of society. His poem, 'Dover Beach', refers to a 'loss of faith' that leaves humanity in confusion on a 'darkling plain' with no joy, peace or 'help for pain'. Arnold's concerns were picked up by the commissioners who wrote the government-sponsored Newbolt Report of 1921. Entitled 'The Teaching of English in England', the report asserted that the study of English language and literature was a means of ennobling young people at all levels of society. 'Great' English literature distilled the best of English culture and could provide a civilising influence in lieu of that historically provided by religion. Dixon (1967) frames it as follows: 'Through literature all that was best in national thought and feeling could be handed on to a generation that knew largely slums and economic depression' (3).

George Sampson, a member of the Newbolt commission, was concerned with young people being taught their home language, the language in which they think and define themselves. In his book, *English for the English*, he wrote:

It includes and transcends all "subjects." It is for English people the whole means of expression, the attainment of which makes them articulate and intelligible human beings, able to inherit the past, to possess the present and to confront the future. (1920, xi)

Sampson described a literacy that went beyond functionality. Command of the language in which they expressed their 'intellectual life' (xi) led students to a kind of actualisation that did more than simply prepare them for integration into the economic life of industrial Britain.

[T]he purpose of the elementary school is really to develop the *mind* and *soul* of the children and not merely to provide tame and acquiescent 'labour fodder'...The safety of the world and the future of civilisation depend upon the *character* and *intelligence* of the multitude. (16, italics mine)

For Sampson, the importance of studying English was to access and activate 'mind', 'soul', 'character' and 'intelligence' by engaging with students' home language. The powerful role of language in shaping identity and thought was to be recognised and employed.

As English was evolving as a school subject, it was also finding a place and shape in universities. The first half of the twentieth century saw the development of a movement that came to be identified as 'literary criticism', a movement furthered by such literary critics as Cleanth Brooks, I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis. The starting point was that literature was a legitimate object of study and that it could be analysed and discussed in terms particularly suited to this. The general implication was that literature carried an aesthetic and moral value that could be discerned by those who were suitably educated and appropriately sensitised. Davies (1989) expresses how this movement influenced and translated into practice in the classroom.

[T]he central beliefs of a Leavisite English teaching tradition involve a commitment to the study of literature as the only effective means for engaging with the personal development of young people through the quality of the language used by individual authors, and through the universality of their insights. (412)

The influence of Newbolt, Sampson and the literary critics was to redefine the *raison d'être* of English as a subject, recalibrating its focus onto English literature and its putative capacity to effect moral and aesthetic refinement. This

movement or emphasis is identified as 'cultural heritage' by both Dixon (1967) and the Cox report of 1988, in that the aim was to perpetuate the best elements of English culture as they were expressed through language in literature. The study of English furthered the 'inculcation of the moral qualities of a civilized adult' (Allen, 1980)<sup>1</sup>. This school of literary criticism proved massively influential throughout the twentieth century and is still manifest in how English is taught today. That said, it underwent significant challenge from various quarters to the extent that it could no longer claim to be the dominant paradigm in English studies. There was more to studying English. For one, the 'stern moral enterprise' of someone like F.R. Leavis was 'fundamentally elitist' (Goodwyn and Branson, 2005:8), the pursuit of a coterie rather than a truly democratic concern. Furthermore, the cultural heritage model 'confirmed the average teacher in his attention to the written word (the point of strength in his training) as against the spoken word (the pupil's strength)' (Dixon, 1967:3); the emphasis on the sophistication of style and sentiment was accessible to some but not to most. In short, what had not sufficiently been made allowance for was the voice of the student not just in studying but in *using* her own language. The inheritance of a cultural heritage required less agency than it did acquiescence; it had more to do with responding to established literary works for the purpose of appreciating their declared worth than it did with creating work that was unique and personally meaningful to the student.

To bring this together, the gains made by English as a subject in the first half of the twentieth century were driven largely by the elevated profile of literature and literary analysis<sup>2</sup>. The formidable canon of English literature provided not

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<sup>1</sup> George Steiner's (1987) 'To civilize our gentlemen' calls into question this foundational assumption that literature has the power to humanize, arguing that there is, in fact, historical evidence of collusion between 'the literary imagination' (30) and 'political bestiality'.

<sup>2</sup> Hudson and Walmsley (2005) describe a lack of grammar teaching in English schools in the first half of the twentieth century for which they give two reasons. Firstly, the modeling of English grammar on Latin grammar resulted in 'bizarre analyses' (606) that presented little if any relevance to the student. Secondly, the rise of literary analysis was to no small degree predicated on the demise of

only the content for English studies but also its methodology, traditionally two of the legitimising features of any academic subject. The starting point was literature – ‘great’ literature. Student writing in this configuration was – to employ an oft-cited metaphor – the handmaiden of literary study. Where writing was occasioned apart from response to literature, it was expected to model the forms of literature.

At this stage in the development of English the Subject, writing was still guided by the rationale of Classical study, namely that there were types of writing with which students needed to familiarise themselves for the purpose of reproducing their forms. Durst and Newell (1989) trace this line of thinking as far back as Aristotle and to the latter part of the nineteenth century (377):

In 19th and 20th century Britain and America, however, Aristotle's *topoi* (the ways various kinds of evidence can be arrayed and employed in argumentation) came to be used not as active means of exploring ideas, but as static structures taught as ends in themselves.

Both Durst and Newell (1989) and Applebee (2000) make reference to Alexander Bain, the influential Scottish educationalist, whose classification of writing into description, narration, exposition, and poetry ‘provided a guiding structure for composition programs for nearly a century and a half’ (Applebee, 2000:4). Bain’s ‘static structures’ are typical of the belief that great writing occurs well beyond the reach of school students, whose most vaulting ambition should be to reproduce correctly the typical forms derived from said great writing. Good student writers write according to form. Students may write interesting, evocative and well-crafted essays, but these descriptors are applied as functions of the essays’ fidelity to the forms of writing they set out to exemplify.

The chief shortcoming of this formal approach was that the writing produced bore ‘little direct relation to the ways in which writing is structured in out-of-

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grammar teaching – teachers of literature actively distanced what they were doing from the study of grammar.

school contexts' (Applebee, 2000:4). In other words, writing was both propagated by and validated almost exclusively within the classroom. With literature as the dominant mode in English the Subject, writing had yet to come into its own, whatever that would look like. Writing was always there, but it had yet to be explored at any length for its educational potential and championed as a worthy pursuit independent of its service to literature. *Writing in and of itself did not serve as a justifying rationale or organising principle for English as a subject.* The dedication of this opening section to describing the development of English as a subject is important because it tells the story of writing's movement from the periphery to the centre of the subject.

### **Personal growth, Dartmouth and Holbrook**

An important shift happened between the heyday of the cultural heritage emphasis of the first half of the twentieth century and the advent of the 1960s. In his discussion of the 1989 Cox Report, Davies (1989) identifies an overlap in the report's application of the terms 'cultural heritage' and 'personal growth'. The continuity between the two lies in the practice of 'literary criticism', the discipline promoted by Leavis and others. The shift that took place was in how the benefits of literary criticism were understood and applied. Leavisite criticism sought to address the rising tide of industrialised and populist ignorance by establishing a beachhead in the Academy; the concern was for the deterioration of English culture at large. While David Holbrook, Denys Thompson, Frank Whitehead and others entertained the same concern, they directed their attentions more squarely towards the importance of literature for the individual child in the secondary school. The shift was not so much a revolution as it was a redirection of efforts. The concern was still for society at large – Holbrook (1967) says that the proper study of English 'releases sympathy and creative energy in community' (17) – but it worked on the principle that society evolves favourably from increasing numbers of right-thinking young people leaving school and entering the realm of the social, the political and the economic.

The defining terms are those of 'growth' and 'maturity'. English literature represents the 'highest expression of the human spirit' (Abbs, 1976:4), and its study furthers the 'inculcation of the moral qualities of a civilized adult' (Allen, 1980). Thompson frames this as 'maturation' (1969:4), while Holbrook (1967), in speaking of teachers of English, states frankly, 'Our aim is maturity' (111). Whitehead (1966) asserts that the role of the teacher is not 'instruction' (16) but 'guidance', particularly with regard to developing the student's 'power to be self-critical about his own efforts'. The assumed maturing and civilising power of religious belief has been conferred on literature as it was in the times of Arnold and Sampson.

David Holbrook, Denys Thompson and Frank Whitehead are clearly not the only voices on this matter, but they are among the most significant<sup>3</sup>. Davies (1989) writes that Holbrook 'probably represents the most single-minded expression of a Leavisite philosophy in the context of secondary education' (405). He provides continuity between Leavis's work in the Academy and the application of Leavis's principles to secondary schooling. Of Thompson, Allen (1980) writes that he 'saw the English teacher's main task as the teaching of literature, very much in terms of countering the effects of a mass society' (9). Literature, to Thompson, had the 'power to redeem' (McEwan, 1992:120). Holbrook's *English for maturity* (1964), Whitehead's *The disappearing dais* (1966) and Thompson's *Directions in the teaching of English* (1969) form a neat triumvirate of treatises on how English was being framed as a school subject at the time. There is one idea that illustrates well the guiding principles of English teaching at this time, namely that of *immersion*.

Thompson makes the following statement in *Directions*: 'In the experience of many, plenty of reading backed by plenty of writing produces an improvement in every part of English' (12). He doesn't elaborate on who the 'many' are nor does he specify how much is 'plenty' or what kind of reading or writing needs to be

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<sup>3</sup> Hudson and Walmsley (2005) identify Holbrook, Thompson and Whitehead as among those chiefly responsible for displacing grammar from the school syllabus in favour of literature and 'the search for creativity in writing' (609).

done, but he does make reference earlier in the piece to a 'climate of maturation' (4). This climate involves 'talk, drama and other activities in which there is an element of "creativity"'. His confidence does not rest on technique but on the inherent power of literature and the innate desire for imaginative engagement that he believes exists in all students. Whitehead picks up this theme when he writes:

The main business of the English teacher is not *instruction* in any direct sense, nor even teaching in the sense which may be applicable in some other subjects. It is the provision of abundant *opportunity* for the child to use English under the *conditions* which will most *conduce* to improvement. (16, italics mine)

Thompson uses the word 'climate'; Whitehead refers to 'conditions'. Both imply that the teacher's task is not to apply a delineated *methodology* but rather to create the right sort of *environment*. Holbrook's contribution to this is to write that

anyone who has experienced the work of a good college of education or teacher's in-service training centre *knows* what disciplines and forms of understanding are valuable in practice. They are developed from experience of the *tacit, intuitive* and *imaginative* processes of 'encounter' in the classroom. (12, italics mine)

There is the strong implication here that English is inherently resistant to reductive methodology; it cannot be stripped down to component parts and taught in any way piecemeal. Referring to writing, Whitehead talks with obvious distaste about a 'conscious mechanical skill' that is an 'essentially synthetic... sequence of techniques' (152). The terms he chooses as alternatives are 'natural', 'acquisition', 'imitation', 'unconscious assimilation' and 'intuitive adaption' (154). Thompson asserts that 'creativity sometimes means no more than getting pupils engaged in writing on subjects that concern them' (5) and speaks with Whitehead's distaste of a 'prescribed syllabus from outside [which is]...mechanistically applied' (11). Holbrook goes so far as to say that '[i]f teacher training is good enough, you can allow schools and teachers to teach in their own way in England' (25). The idea coming through here is that in order for students

to mature through English they need to be immersed in a literature- and imagination-rich environment overseen by teachers who are themselves mature in English. Such teachers, properly attuned to the power of imaginative writing, will inevitably draw the same out of their students. Holbrook, Thompson and Whitehead place their faith in the heuristic qualities of an environment facilitated by someone genuinely passionate and insightful. It is the logical conclusion of the growth metaphor: life forms mature because they are nurtured properly and not because they are instructed to grow. Writing improves because writers mature. Writers mature because they are in an environment conducive to it.

This approach to writing – to the subject as a whole – was thrown into relief by the Dartmouth Conference of 1967. The conference, which was meant to be a watershed collaboration between British and American theorists, turned into a watershed debate over the very nature of the subject in question. The British theorists, whose pedagogy espoused the ‘sunburn principle’ (Lewis, 1968:429) – that exposure rather than instruction was needed – annoyed the American theorists, whose pedagogy was more direct and instructive in nature. As Lewis (1968) puts it, ‘the crucial test of the British and American attitudes [was]...the degree of intervention by the teacher which they [were]...willing to tolerate’ (429). Parker (1979) relates this even more directly to the teaching of writing when he summarises the British approach as follows: ‘[W]riting is learned by doing it and sharing it with real audiences, not by studying and applying abstract rhetorical principles in exercises which the teacher alone will read and judge’ (36). Harris (1991) articulates it as being the difference between the British seeing English primarily as a school subject and the Americans seeing it primarily as an academic discipline (634).

One can view the American position at Dartmouth, then, as an attempt to justify the study of English to other university experts, and the British position as trying to place such work in relation to the needs and concerns of students...The Americans tried to define the subject matter of English apart from the ways it is taught; the British saw the work of teachers and students as an intrinsic part of what that subject was. (635, 640)

What the Dartmouth seminar illustrated was a conflict in teaching philosophies. Ironically, by the time Dartmouth arrived, the British approach had moved away from high academic concerns towards a kind of student-validating democracy, just as the American approach had closed the door on 'vague' progressiveness (Applebee, 1974; Parker, 1979) and sought to validate English the subject in the realms of academics, politics and economics. The immersive approach of Holbrook, Whitehead and Thompson is demonstrative (though not exhaustively representative) of how English the Subject in 1960s Britain had placed individual development as its guiding rationale. The student, properly immersed in a literature-rich environment (of the 'right' literature, mind you) overseen by an aesthetically and emotionally perceptive teacher, would inevitably start to absorb the qualities of this environment. Again, the terms 'growth' and 'maturity' – although they are not perfectly congruent (Harris, 1991:638) – both allude to the importance of *environment* over *instruction*. The point of entry is the teacher, whose own standing as an English aesthete is fundamental to the cultivation of similar faculties in others.

The application of this approach to writing is articulated by Holbrook. He is not the only voice but he does distil much of the essence of the issue. This can be conveyed by his use of two terms: 'art' and 'intuition'. In *English for meaning*, he writes that 'teaching English...is an art, rooted in intuitive powers' (12). English is included as a school subject not for communication's sake but because it is expressive of our imaginative capacity as human beings. 'Great' literature is its highest expression and to read and engage with literature is not to have it 'measured or brought into a laboratory' (12) but to approach it with awe. Literature emerges from the mysterious realm of imagination and one must come to it imaginatively in order to preserve the mystery. In this sense, he echoes the sentiments of Peter Abbs, who refers to the 'creative and integrating powers of the psyche' (4) which should be at 'the centre of education', never mind just English as a subject. In the opinions of Holbrook and Abbs, English *should* be treated as an imaginative art but is *actually* treated as a science.

In this schema, writing in the classroom is first and foremost a means of accessing the inner symbolic workings of the mind. In an interview with Lois Rosen in 1978, Holbrook is recorded as saying:

People need to continually make patterns, to make forms, to see things relating one to the other, to try and find out what sort of person they are, what their relationship is to the world, and what their potentialities are; this is very important. (1978a:22)

An inelegant rendering of this is to say that writing is a means of thinking through who we are, who others are, what the world is about and how it all fits together. Allen (1980) suggests that to Holbrook literature and writing are forms of therapy, an attempt to represent externally what is happening internally. The emphasis is on *intuition* with the unconscious playing a major role in what is produced. This is exemplified in Holbrook's chapter on 'Creative Writing at Sweet Sixteen' in *English for meaning* in which he describes a week spent in rural Yorkshire with sixteen girls aged 16 who wanted to write poetry. He was commissioned as one of two poets to accompany them. Holbrook reproduces over thirty pieces of the girls' writing, almost all of it poetry, and uses them to guide his meditations on the thought processes of the girls, contemplating the social and cultural forces at work on them to compel the thoughts recorded. As the title of the book indicates, he is interested in how the young writers employ English to make meaning of their inner and outer worlds. By writing, they give voice to what would otherwise have remained unexpressed and unexplored.

As such, Holbrook strongly resists the reduction of writing to preformed categories or theories<sup>4</sup>. The 'explicit approaches' (12), 'abstract rules' and 'structures' (13) he sees being put forward by the Bullock Report of 1975, for example, are anathema to the kind of personal, authentic writing he believes should take place in the classroom. The application of any kind of 'mechanistic' (13) model to writing is to kill the very thing it is meant to inspire. Holbrook does not present a formula to pass on to aspiring teachers of writing. Writing in

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<sup>4</sup> Holbrook uses the term 'theory' pejoratively in his polemic against the Bullock Report in *English for meaning*. Of course, his own assertions about literature and writing are based on a theory on the value and purpose of both.

the classroom is not about writing to form or formula. It is about honest, thoughtful engagement and it is the teacher, not a theory or document, that must lead the way in establishing the sort of environment where students find this both possible and desirable.

Holbrook's approach to writing (and English in general) is in many ways the extrapolation and end point of the 'growth' and 'maturity' model. As one reviewer puts it, 'In one hand he raises a hunting horn, in the other he swings a sharp two-edged sword' (Brown, 1961:112), taking on those who would promote 'formulas, stereotypes and stock responses'. Holbrook and those in his corner carved out a space in the English curriculum for writing that was personal and a-functional in nature. The restrictions of 'static structures' had been overcome and students were writing for writing's sake, not simply for the purpose of analysis or transaction.

An illustration of a Holbrook-type approach to writing is *Beat not the poor desk* by Marie Ponsot and Rosemary Deen (1982), both Americans. Published at the beginning of the 1980s, the book presents a case for teaching writing that rests heavily on both the teacher's experience as a writer – 'an infinite resource' (37) – and the teacher's ability to impart the insights of this experience to her students. They state the following: 'We use all we know to teach them [students]. But *not* directly' (8, italics original). The 'all we know' is not something that they delineate any further than five 'elemental skills', which are themselves fairly broad. What teaches a young person to write is the very act of writing, the repetition and 'steady practice' (7) of the act of putting thoughts to paper which then allows for 'correctness and eloquence' (49) to be 'discovered' rather than drilled. This echoes Thompson's call for 'plenty of writing', what Ponsot and Deen would refer to as 'prolific writing' (6). Undergirding this approach is the assertion that writing is 'energizing, pleasure-full, self-evidently constructive' (7) and that the teacher's role is to lead her students into this realisation, as Ponsot and Deen put it, to 'make writing prevail' (8). The animating, stimulating and fruitful nature of writing is fundamentally what provides the right 'conditions' or 'climate' for students to take it up with genuine interest for themselves.

Everything proceeds from this. A student who has not savoured the essential pleasures of writing will never reach her potential as a writer. Conversely, the student who finds meaning and delight in the act is destined to improve.

At the risk of giving away the plot, it must be noted that the discussion about writing thus far has remained pretty squarely within the bounds of the subject of English. The debate has been about what students write on account of their enrolment in English and not about what they write in other subjects. A reason for this may be that English to this point had been concerned with establishing its identity and profile, and writing had been assumed as part of the 'tripod' (McEwan, 1992; Parker, 1979) that contributed to this endeavour. In the territory beyond Dartmouth, writing becomes less a preserve of English and more a concern for education at large.

### **Britton and the Reports**

In his reflection on the influence of Dartmouth, Harris (1991) offers the following summary:

The aim of the growth theorists was thus to get rid of as much of the restrictive apparatus of the school as they could – by having students read, write, and talk about subjects of real concern to them, and by having their teacher not so much judge as respond to their work. (642)

On the whole, the British resisted the American approach because of its apparent top-down nature and the role in which this cast the teacher, namely as an instructor with pre-determined inside knowledge. According to the Americans, English had to have a clear *content* which was delivered by suitably responsible practitioners who were familiar with it. English the Subject was to be determined in the Academy and students were to be brought up to speed in the classroom. This was in stark contrast to the British vision of the teacher as a thoughtful, largely independent aesthete whose practice was principally determined not by the transmission of a body of knowledge but by observation and perception.

That said, the British participants at Dartmouth were not an undifferentiated unit. Harris (1991) indicates as much in the distinction he draws between the 'maturity' (e.g. Holbrook, Whitehead) and 'growth' (e.g. John Dixon, James Britton) positions (638). The maturity advocates drew more heavily on the tenets of the cultural heritage model, on literature having power to inculcate moral substance and writing as a means of purging the moral dross accumulated by exposure to the mass media. By contrast, the driving motivation of the growth advocates was to give close attention and validity to how students actually *used* the English language. This could be done without reference to established literature. At the heart of this perspective is the assertion that children use language 'for their own purposes' (Dixon, 1967:4) and that English teachers need to base their practice on the 'observation of language in operation from day to day' (6). Harris (1991) articulates this in the following manner: 'Where Leavis [echoed by the maturity theorists] had made a higher order of experience ("fine living") the aim of study in English, they [growth theorists] centred their work in talk about the ordinary experiences of schoolchildren' (638-639).

Significantly, in the year of the Dartmouth Conference, James Britton established the Writing Research Unit of the London Institute of Education. It would be four years after the conference that Britton would publish his seminal work *Language and learning* (1970). In this text (and elsewhere) Britton builds on the work of earlier theorists such as James Moffett and establishes his own foundation for future theorists such as Arthur Applebee. A principal feature of Britton's work is the hundreds of hours of observation, transcription and annotation of children's talking and writing that form the basis for his theory. In this respect, Britton owes far more to the psycholinguistics of Lev Vygotsky than the literary critical tradition of F.R. Leavis, and it is in this respect that the difference between Britton and Holbrook can be clearly observed. Britton underscores this difference when he writes:

My intention in putting forward this notion of a spectator role was to find an everyday, informal counterpart for the specialized formal discourse we

know as literature and so to create a link between what poets and novelists do and what ordinary mortals and school children can achieve. (1984:320)

Britton's focus was not to maintain the status of great writers or great writing but to give an accurate account of the processes he observed young writers going through in producing what they did. Britton wanted to find terms for the cognitive processes that were at work in both the celebrated playwright and the developing child. The democratic nature of Britton's work may well have contributed to establishing his profile on both sides of the Atlantic. He was able to translate the impulse of the British theorists towards personal growth into concrete terms that provided something of a content for the American theorists to work with. His was not the first detailed study of children's language, but it was a precursor to a raft of research in America into the cognition of writing that would produce strands of theory sheaved together as 'process theory', which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The aim of Britton's research was not simply descriptive. His research was to be directed back into schools towards fostering a better understanding among teachers and policy-makers of whom and with what they were working.

Our task was to create a model which would enable us to characterize all mature written utterances and then go on to trace the developmental steps that led to them. (1975:6)

The purpose of enlightening the teacher and policy-maker was to empower the child.

Ideally one of the goals of schools is that they should, wherever this is possible, produce writers who have developed the capacity to generate their own reasons for writing and to define their own audiences, which should include those which are large in number and unknown. (63-64)

The purposes for writing indicated here further set Britton's work apart from the predominantly literary and psychotherapeutic concerns of Holbrook's approach. The student may write for reasons that are aesthetic, personal and cathartic but does not do so to the exclusion of other writing. In Britton's schema, writing in

which the author is trying to achieve a concrete response (transactional writing) requires as much of the teacher's attention as writing completed for its own aesthetic self (poetic writing). Britton's model of language use was not evaluative in the sense that it didn't elevate one type of writing over another. What Britton and his colleagues at the Writing Research Unit did do, however, was to call for appropriate coverage of the three kinds of writing they identified, namely expressive, transactional and poetic. The problem as they saw it in schools was that writing was seen 'not as a mode of learning, but as a means by which teachers find out what has been learned' (1984:327). As the title of Britton's book indicates, language use does not happen *after the fact* of learning but as an integral *part of the process* of learning.

It is worth outlining Britton's theory of language and learning as it leads directly to an understanding of writing and the role it plays in the life of the adolescent. This formulation points to a key inversion presented by Britton, namely that what happens in the classroom must serve and be guided by developmental processes that are as fundamental as (if not more so than) the claims made upon the child through curricula and so on to integrate academically and economically into society. As Britton puts it,

[i]t is not only that the classroom must more and more merge into the world outside it, but that the processes of school learning must merge into the processes of learning that begin at birth and are life-long. We can no longer regard school learning as simply an interim phase, a period of instruction and apprenticeship that marks the change from immaturity to maturity, from play in the nursery to work in the world. (1970:129)

Britton does not see school as a key intervention in children's capacity to learn and use language. Language formation and learning happens as children discover the world around them and their ability to vocalise their experience of it. There is a wariness about the title of the fourth chapter in *Language and Learning*, 'Now that you go to school', that signals Britton's reservations about the potential for education to stunt rather than stimulate development. With this in mind, Britton's theory of language and learning can be summarised in the following manner.

Our experiences are a collection of representations. When something happens, we remember it according to how we have perceived and interpreted it; a memory is laid down of the event that is not a mere recording of the event. We refer back to how we have represented past events in order to interpret current events, using what we can generalise from the past to make sense of the present. Our interaction with the present is mediated by what we *represent* of the past.

Language is a means of representing experience; it is the system of symbols that we commonly use to organise our recollection of what goes on around us. We use language both to articulate and reflect on experience. Speech begins as a means of organising experience for infants in ways that are, for their own purposes, organised and functional. In comparison to adult speech, infant talk is grammatically inadequate; for the infant, the grammar is wholly adequate for what is required.

The most essential form of language use is *expressive* and is a kind of 'formulation' or 'externalization' (167). This occurs when 'we verbalize what runs through our minds' (169). In terms of writing, this can be described as 'thinking aloud on paper' (Britton, 1975:89), a scripted rendering of what is most immediately apparent in one's thoughts. Expressive writing is not necessarily devoid of audience but it does assume a familiarity – if not congruence – of thought between the writer and the reader. Typical examples of this type of writing are diary entries and personal letters.

The child's use of language becomes increasingly varied and the functions it performs in relation to thought become more sophisticated the more public the language becomes. Public language use casts listeners/readers into one of two roles: participant or spectator. In the first instance, language is used to engage directly with experience: its use is functional and immediate, often because decisions have to be made. This use of language is *transactional*. In the second instance, language is used to engage with experiences that have been completed or have not yet come to pass: language is used to contemplate possibilities. This

is a *poetic* use of language. A central distinction is that transactional writing is an action to prompt further action, whereas the point of poetic writing is to prompt contemplation of what has been written.

Transactional writing is intended to fit into, to articulate with, the ongoing activities of participants: poetic writing is a way of interrupting them – interrupting them by presenting an object to be contemplated in itself and for itself. (1970:175)

Britton's aim was not to promote a new system of classification for the classroom. He sounds a warning to himself and others when he writes that 'we classify at our own peril' (1975:1) and that there is indeed 'no satisfactory way of classifying pieces of writing'. Indeed, he sought to overturn a prescriptive approach to teaching writing that was limited to reproducing four predetermined formats ('modes of discourse'), namely narration, description, exposition and argument (3). It is a tradition to which Britton objected on the basis that it was 'profoundly descriptive and show[ed]...little inclination to observe the writing process' (4).

While Britton's approach could also be described as 'descriptive' in that it seeks to provide descriptors for what it observes, the essential difference is in how the teacher approaches the writing of the child, that is, between conforming the writing to certain forms or developing the writing as a means of expression and learning. His 1975 work, *The development of writing abilities (11-18)*, was a follow-up to *Language and Learning* and was an exercise in employing terms previously coined in order to describe with greater validity what was being done in the classroom. His observation was that informal expressive writing was 'outlawed' (1984:327) in schools, and that poetic writing fared little better. Transactional writing was 'powerfully predominant' as it functioned as a means of demonstrating what students knew, which allowed teachers to gauge and evaluate their progress. Britton's objection to this was that *forms* of writing were being elevated above the *act* of writing, that the only interest in the cognitive processes required for writing was to familiarise them with pre-determined parameters of effectiveness and accuracy.

Teachers, according to Britton, need to be aware of the proportions in which they occasion the different types of writing. This is not because students need to learn the formats of these types of writing but for two important developmental reasons. Firstly, they need to become increasingly aware of and familiar with the roles in which they cast themselves (as writers) and their readers. Writing education should equip students to identify their own audiences. The writer's focus is not on reproducing a form but on anticipating how the written work will be received by a predicted or assumed readership. This relates primarily to writing that requires the writer to differentiate between the reader as spectator (poetic) and participant (transactional). Secondly, and following on from this, teachers should be aware of the amount of expressive writing they facilitate because this form of writing strongly supports learning. The process of 'thinking about a problem' (Rosen, 1978c:55) is echoed in the process of expressive writing. Expressive writing is 'crucial for trying out and coming to terms with new ideas' (Jacobs, 1978:66). As Britton puts it in *The development of writing abilities (11-18)*, the writer is 'free to jump from facts to speculation to personal anecdote to emotional outburst' (quoted in Jacobs, 1978:66). The hegemony of transactional writing that Britton and his colleagues observed needed to be overturned, not because there was anything wrong with transactional writing, but because it was being used chiefly as a post-learning record and because its proliferation was crowding out the other equally legitimate forms of writing.

Once more, the point for Britton of his research and formulations was to identify how best teachers could facilitate growth (development) of their students' writing. The designations of expressive, poetic and transactional were not intended to supplant previous categorisations, because Britton's emphasis was not on the product but on the process of writing. The forms of writing were always meant to point towards what was happening in the thoughts of the writer. The application was to equip the teacher to help the burgeoning writer understand why he wrote and what he could achieve by writing.

We emerge...holding on to the belief that work in school ought to equip a writer to choose his own target audience and, eventually, to be able, when the occasion arises, to write as someone with something to say to the world in general. And we believe many more children would develop the ability if they had more opportunities and a stronger incentive. (192)

Britton's research proceeded on the belief that if the developmental processes at work in writing could be identified they could be nurtured and directed in such a way as to genuinely benefit the student.

This further illustrates the divide between Britton and Holbrook, who believed that theory was inimical to the mystery of writing in trying to reduce it to component parts. This in turn explains Holbrook's disappointment in and disdain for the Bullock Report of 1975 in whose composition Britton played a prominent role. The most obvious sign of Holbrook's displeasure is that the first chapter of *English for Meaning* is entitled 'The Dead End of Bullock', although Holbrook is on record even before that in objecting to the report's putative reliance on linguistics (Rosen, 1978b:25).

The report is clearly influenced by Britton's school of thought. Aside from the fact that Britton is one of the committee members, the clearest indication of this is the report's use of Britton's terms – expressive, transactional and poetic – to describe the different kinds of writing done in English classes. The report's organising principle regarding writing is development (read 'growth'), which refers most directly to the writer's *intention* in responding to *context*. This development is something that can be guided by a valid theoretical framework, in this instance Britton's model of language use. In other words, writing as a cognitive activity can be observed, traced, theorised and, crucially, taught.

The report states: 'The difficulty of structuring development in writing, whether in English or in other subjects, has too often been regarded as insuperable, or as likely to lead to mechanical exercises and practices' (Great Britain Department of Education and Science [GBDES],1975:164). Holbrook's resistance to the report is on this basis, that the magic hand of chance has given way to the dour hand of theory; the teaching of writing in schools has become the pursuit of technique

rather than the opportunity for reflection. Significantly, the report's discussion on writing in Chapter 11 orients itself in contrast to 'creative' (or 'personal' or 'free') writing, a kind of writing widely practised in schools at the time and in principle – though not universally in practice – consistent with Holbrook's view of writing as an activity that requires less direction as it does inspiration<sup>5</sup>. The report is critical of 'creative' writing on two counts. Firstly, the drive for 'spontaneity' too easily reduces the teaching of writing to provocation. Teachers are occupied with trying to 'startle children into spontaneous utterance' (163), encouraging them 'to strive for effect, to produce the purple patch, the stock response' (164). Secondly, the term 'creative' becomes a catch-all for a range of otherwise disparate kinds of writing. On both counts, the 'free' approach to writing does nothing to purposefully exercise the cognitive faculties governing writing.

The Bullock Report was not only criticised for being too prescriptive: it was criticised for not being prescriptive enough. At an early stage, the report says that it is 'a characteristic of English that it does not hold together as a body of knowledge which can be identified, quantified, then transmitted' (5). The teacher can respond by trying 'to impose shape on what *seems* amorphous, rigour on what *seems* undisciplined' (italics mine) or by embracing English's 'all-inclusiveness' as an 'opportunity' rather than a 'handicap'. The Bullock Report still echoes strongly the general position of the British theorists at Dartmouth who disputed the American claim for the self-evident delineation of English as a subject.

Thus, the Bullock Report is significant because it represents a period of transition in English the Subject. The aim is still to empower the student in her own language and not to subjugate her to an established and static body of

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<sup>5</sup> Both Holbrook and Britton see merit in children simply expressing themselves through language. Both are attentive to how children write and what they write. Their point of divergence is that Holbrook follows the language back to the emotional and intellectual life of the child whereas Britton follows the language back to the cognitive processes guiding the act of writing itself. Holbrook's primary interest is in how the child becomes more self-aware as he writes; Britton's interest is also in how the child becomes more socially aware.

knowledge, but the teacher has been given a theoretical basis on which to guide the student's development. The report allows for more intervention than was generally accommodated by the British at Dartmouth. Britton's model of language use inevitably requires the teacher to play a role in guiding development; the model provides the teacher with insight as to what she is observing and empowers her to intervene. This is illustrated in the following extract from the report:

Wherever spontaneity is exclusively valued...development can be inhibited. Children reach a point where they need new techniques, having run through the satisfaction of their spontaneous performances...The solution lies in a recognition on the part of teachers that a writer's intention is prior to his need for techniques. The teacher who aims to extend the pupil's power as a writer must therefore work first upon his intentions, and then upon the techniques appropriate to them. When this is understood there is every reason why spontaneity should be an element in a great deal of what a child writes. Spontaneity then becomes capable of surviving the transition from artlessness to art; or in plainer terms, of supporting a writer in his search for new techniques appropriate to his novel intentions. (164)

The report does not outlaw 'spontaneity' nor does it make 'technique' the be-all and end-all. The student's 'intention', his awareness of why he is writing, is what informs them both. The teacher is positioned to give the student expert help in realising what demands are being made on him as he writes and how his writing needs to respond to these demands. Brunetti (1978) says that 'the report calls for a sensitive balance between laissez faire methods and directive teaching approaches' (60). The development of the student writer is meant to be 'natural'; the intervention of the teacher is meant to be 'appropriate'. The teacher cannot legitimately intervene unless she has provided 'a rich environment' in which there is 'opportunity and motivation to write for a number of purposes'.

By 1989 and the Cox Report, English in England had experienced a corralling as the subject sought to justify its existence in a conservative political and economic climate. A grimly amusing indication of the political pressure brought to bear not only on the subject but also the Cox Report is the fact that Chapters 15, 16 and 17 of the report are presented before Chapters 1 through to 14. The chairman of the

committee, Professor Brian Cox, relates how secretary of state Kenneth Baker and Tory MP Angela Rumbold wanted to edit the report in order to please the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Aware that this would anger teachers and provide fodder for the media, they compromised and printed the 'acceptable' chapters 15 to 17 on yellow-tinted paper at the beginning of the document (Cox, 1991:11-12 on education.org.uk). More grim and less amusing is the pared-down rendering of writing in the report. Both writing's transcendent (Holbrook) and its developmental (Britton) qualities receive little treatment. What is presented instead is a cursory treatment of how writing and speaking are similar-yet-different followed by a section of 'Assumptions' and then a list of 'Attainment Targets'. The 'Assumptions' section says a lot but not much at the same time. It does exactly what it says: it assumes a version of the subject and of child development with no obvious basis for doing so. And it is not too much to conclude that the language of Attainment Targets is one of the features of these chapters that made endeared them to a government looking for objective deliverables.

# The American debate

## Chapter 3

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### Writing observed: the 1970s

In 1975, Donald Graves wrote the following in his essay, 'An Examination of the Writing Processes of Seven Year Old Children':

To date the need for developmental studies related to children's writing has been virtually ignored. Direct contact and extended observation of the children themselves are necessary to reach conclusions relating to developmental variables involving the behaviors of children. In fields such as psychiatry, child development, or anthropology, the investigation of behaviors would be unthinkable without the direct observation of the persons to be studied. (241)

There are a few comments that need to be made on this extract. Firstly, it locates his essay at a time when the very sort of 'developmental studies' to which he refers were slowly starting to find purchase within considerations of teaching composition. At the time of his writing, according to Graves, only two studies had been based on actual observation of writers at work, of which Janet Emig's (1971) *The composing processes of twelfth graders* was one<sup>6</sup>. Graves's omission of Britton's *Language for Learning*, written five years previously, is puzzling, but may have something to do with British and American theorists moving in different orbits around the same issue. The significant distance between them at Dartmouth may still have existed some eight years later.

Be that as it may, before the end of the decade, Mina Shaughnessy (1977) would have published *Errors and Expectations* and at the beginning of the next decade Linda Flower and John Hayes (1981) would publish 'A cognitive process theory of writing'. Both are detailed studies of young writers at work which helped to give impetus to this kind of research in the 1980s and beyond. By 1982, Patricia

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<sup>6</sup> Nystrand (2006) marks Emig's work as the beginning of empirical research in North America into writing (11).

Bizzell, in her critical analysis of such studies as that of Flower and Hayes, could confidently state: 'We are pretty much agreed, in other words, that what we need to know about writing has to do with the thinking processes involved in it' (388). By the early 1980s, Donald Murray's often-referenced injunction in 1972 to teach writing as a process and not a product had been accepted as an essential tenet of composition studies. Hairston (1982) underscores this when she says, 'We have to do the hard thing, examine the intangible process, rather than the easy thing, evaluate the tangible product' (84).

The second comment to be made on Graves's statement has to do with its implication that the teaching of writing needs to have its own basis of research and theory. Up to that point, theories of teaching writing had been based on linguistic and rhetorical theory that, while relevant, did not translate into usable pedagogy. These disciplines may have informed the teaching of writing but could not serve as proxies for it. Harris (1991), in his discussion of Dartmouth, quotes James Miller's recollection of a British participant's indignant response to American teaching material which Miller describes as 'unreadable' and 'baffling', 'cabalistic' and 'covered with strange hieroglyphics' (639). This was junior high material that had been rendered from Noam Chomsky's linguistic theory and presented to teachers to convey to their students. The theory was important but it did not prove to be of practical help to either the teacher or the student. As Moffett (1994) puts it, 'What may be a properly narrow or specialized arena for investigation can become a crippling compass for learning' (21).

Parker (1979) points to what he sees as the fundamental assumption guiding this sort of approach to writing: 'learning consists of knowing about (a higher order activity), which must precede doing (a lower order activity), and that correct doing can only follow from proper knowing about' (34). In other words, students will learn how to write by being acquainted with a content that adequately explains writing. As Parker puts it, 'organized knowledge' transforms into 'improved writing' (34). The top-down nature of such an approach to teaching writing understandably raised the hackles of British participants.

Parker's account of the relationship between composition studies and linguistics and rhetoric is important not only for what it shows us about the teaching of writing but for what it reveals about how that teaching is influenced by the broader socio-political context. He argues that schools in America in the 1960s were at the business end of national concern over how the Soviets seemed to be getting ahead in terms of scientific breakthrough and industrialisation, symbolised in the launch of Sputnik. The Woods Hole Conference of 1959 – a direct educational response to Soviet progress – set the academic tone of 1960s America. Education had to be fast-tracked in order to match the kind of intellectual heft evidenced by putting satellites into orbit. So much was at stake that education was compelled to provide measurable justification for what it put forward to be learned. In fact, the more fundamental insistence was on putting something forward to be learned, on presenting delineable contents that would define its constituent subjects. English was subject to this same rationalising and was under more pressure than ever to give account of its *use* to society. It was not enough for English to exist as an aesthetic or even moral pursuit – these intangibles were difficult to quantify. Thus it was that English organised itself around existing bodies of knowledge – linguistics and rhetoric – that could give it the legitimacy it needed.

Graves insists that any sort of writing pedagogy should proceed from the actual observation of writing. He qualifies his position when he says:

The complexity of the writing process and the interrelationships of its components have been underestimated by researchers, teachers, and other educators, because writing is an organic process that frustrates approaches to explain its operation. (227)

The observation of the 'organic process' of writing should lead to an 'organic understanding' of it. Graves's use of 'organic' can be interpreted as him deferring to the 'intangible' aspects of writing and attempting to give an account of the cognitive processes involved in writing that does not reduce them to mere 'skills', component parts that if mastered add up to competent writing. McEwan (1992) identifies a mechanistic approach to English that would most obviously

be at odds with Graves's approach, one that relies heavily on behaviourist psychology to explain how English should work as a subject. It is a matrix of cause and effect which yields the sort of predictable outcomes favoured by the Project English of post-Sputnik America.

Graves's qualification echoes Britton's caveat regarding classification on the basis that the application of a definitive theory has the potential to ride roughshod over the nuance of young people's thinking. The point of both Graves and Britton's research is to provide insight into what is already happening rather than prescribe what should be happening. One way of understanding the growth metaphor is to extrapolate it: teachers are gardeners not carpenters. Their students' imaginations are not raw material to be fashioned by theory into predetermined forms but dynamic and distinct organisms that require careful attention to maximise their potential. The inherent (and ironic) complication in this is that even this cultivation gravitates towards theory. The trajectory of such research as that of Graves and Britton is methodology in some shape or form. What must teachers *do* with the observation that their students use language expressively, transactionally and poetically<sup>7</sup>?

Both Britton and the process-oriented movement prefigured and/or given impetus by Emig, Graves, Flower, Hayes and others came in for criticism on this count. In Olson's (2002) terms, theorizing gave way to Theory (234); what was meant to remain fluid became reified. Bizzell (1982) provides a useful handle on this by her distinction between 'inner-' and 'outer-directed' theories of composition. The inner-directed theorists are those at the vanguard of the process movement, and she takes the work of Flower and Hayes (1981) as representative in this regard. Their focus is on distilling the 'fundamental' (389) and therefore 'universal' processes of thought behind writing. As has been demonstrated, these theorists believe that writing issues out of innate (inner) developmental processes. They are on a 'quest for certainty' (405) in trying to

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<sup>7</sup> This tendency towards pedagogy will be discussed later in this chapter and in the next.

describe comprehensively what happens when students write<sup>8</sup>. Bizzell's account of their motives for doing so refer to the 'legitimation crisis' facing English the Subject: it is an attempt to establish credibility.

In seeking one universal model of the composing process, inner-directed theorists seek a new set of principles for our discipline that will raise their arguments, as one has put it, "above mere ideology" (Hirsch, p.4). They seek a kind of certainty they believe is accessible only to science, and their talk of paradigm-shifting invokes [Thomas] Kuhn to announce that our discipline will soon have a scientific basis. (405)

The application of an empirical approach to composition studies – as promoted by Graves – provides an 'accountability hedge' (406) for the discipline against the rationalising demands of society, in this case, post-Sputnik America. It is the same impulse that saw English organise itself along linguistic and rhetorical lines.

Bizzell further criticises the inner-directed theorists because they disregard social context in the development of language and the role of 'discourse communities' (388) in determining the educational success or failure of any given student<sup>9</sup>. Language is a social construct not an abstractly cognitive one. Nystrand (2006) puts it thus:

Cognitive models of writing had depicted writers as solitary individuals struggling mainly with their thoughts; audience was viewed, at most, as an ancillary element of the writing process. (20)

Language conveys value and mediates power and to ignore these functions is itself an evaluative and mediatory act. English teachers have the responsibility to bring to their students' attention the discourse communities of which they are a part and with which they interact, including those of the schools they attend. It

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<sup>8</sup> The most basic expression of this is the 'Pre-writing, writing and post-writing/editing) model. The multi-faceted process model of Flower and Hayes (1981) is an elaboration of this and provides a clear example of the pursuit of Bizzell's 'inner-directed' theorists for certainty and comprehensiveness.

<sup>9</sup> In fairness, Shaughnessy is exempt from Bizzell's criticism given that there was a strong social element to her research.

echoes the tension identified by Davies (1989) between the 'cultural heritage' and 'cultural analysis' aspects of English the Subject; the content of the subject prompts students to interrogate the content.

Given that this criticism can be applied to varying degrees to both Britton and the process theorists, we need to examine the particular criticisms of both in turn. Britton does not sit squarely in the camp of the process theorists and there are aspects of his work that have attracted criticism on separate grounds from those of the process theorists. Furthermore, it is appropriate to explore this criticism of Britton in this chapter as it relates to how his work was taken up and applied in the United States.

### **Back to Britton**

Durst and Newell (1989) give an account of the influence of Britton's work on writing theory in the States, pointing out that he has had more bearing on research than on actual curriculum development (379). Their intention is to show just how Britton's model of language use has been employed in conducting research into student writing. Using Britton's category system as a point of departure, they review the work of other theorists who have sought to elaborate on Britton's categories. They return to one of the most telling observations of Britton's initial study, namely that schools favour transactional writing because it is the most efficient way – so it would seem – to find out what students know. (It must be remembered that Britton's scope was language across the curriculum not only in the subject of English.) Durst and Newell touch on a number of the different modes of writing explored in the reviewed research, including responses to short-answer questions, summarising, analysing and note-taking. Their conclusion is that these different uses of writing are distinct enough to warrant distinct studies into their relationship to learning; they cannot simply be grouped together under a general heading.

Discussions of writing as a learning process go astray when they neglect to specify the kinds of learning that writing might be expected to

foster...Although writing theorists and teachers have tended to assume in a general way that writing aids learning, writing functions appear to have specific rather than general effects. (384, 386)

They reiterate the point that the categories put forward by Britton and others are not prescriptive in the sense that they tell teachers what kind of writing to elicit from their students. The modes are not desired formats for students to replicate. Rather, they provide teachers with a theoretical justification and taxonomy to guide their practice. The aim is to develop the student's sense of himself as a writer in order to adapt his writing to fulfil his purposes, what Applebee (2000) refers to as 'developing a voice in a wider array of conversations' (6).

Durst and Newell make it clear that Britton's work was a precursor to much other research into the ways in which writing exercises the cognitive faculties of students. There are many of these ways and now, as at the times of Britton and Durst and Newell, it is not acceptable for teachers – not just English teachers – to use writing in ways most convenient to them. The most obvious uses for writing across the curriculum may be forms such as short answers, summaries, analyses and notes, but teachers must be clear about what students are learning by performing these acts of writing. The work of Britton and others problematises the assumption that writing is simply the record of what has been learned. Writing is a means of learning and teachers need to understand how this works across all the writing they cause their students to complete.

This brings us to one of the central tenets of Britton's work, namely that teachers need to encourage what he calls 'expressive' writing. This has been touched on in the previous chapter and it bears repeating that Britton promoted expressive writing because, as a form of writing that 'follows the contours of thought' (Durst and Newell 1989:387), it provides a unique forum in which students can explore ideas. Britton believed that schools in general did not have a culture in which the essential developmental and educational importance of 'thinking aloud on paper' (Britton, 1975:89) was recognised, and it was to exposing and rectifying this that

he put much of his research to work. The writing across the curriculum that Britton promotes is primarily of an expressive nature.

The aspect of Britton's 'expressive' category that drew criticism was his claim that it formed the basis from which other forms of language use evolved. Durst and Newell explain that, because expressive language use is 'close to the self' (387) and assumes either no audience or a very familiar audience, Britton believed that it echoes children's earliest use of language and is thus 'a kind of matrix from which differentiated forms of mature writing are developed' (Britton, 1975:83). Durst and Newell argue that this claim has not been substantiated by research and that Britton himself admitted to it being problematic.

Further criticism of Britton's work has focused on his distinction between the spectator and participant roles, particularly the fact that he seeks to classify written work according to one role to the exclusion of the other. A feature of Britton's research was the classification of the written work examined into categories based on the role in which the writer had cast him/herself. In order for this classification to bear results statistically, Britton and his colleagues identified a 'dominant function' (Durst and Newell, 1989:387) in each text. This had the result of sorting the work one way or the other without allowing for the fact that a great deal of writing is done by people moving between roles who thus produce work that could be classified as both transactional and poetic. (Not to mention work that contains elements of expressive, transactional and poetic in equal measure.) The irony is that, having warned against classification, Britton is himself criticised for too rigidly classifying.

A final critique of Britton's work has to do with its cross-disciplinary nature, a feature that Durst and Newell say is also its greatest strength. Britton's concern was not solely (or even mainly) with English as a school subject but with English as a language used in schools. Harris (1991) refers to an analogy used by Britton himself to describe how English the Subject relates to education. Britton compares education to a jam tart pastry out of which are cut subjects according

to their content. What is left of the pastry is English, a subject that serves the others in their common state of being taught in English. The role of the English teacher in his classroom, aside from the very important job of nurturing an aesthetic appreciation of the language, is to help students to adapt their language use for the different contexts occasioned by their other subjects. Where Britton's theory has been criticized is that it hasn't made sufficient distinction between the other subjects for their particular language needs. The expressive, poetic and transactional modes prove to be useful terminology for discussing how students employ language in other disciplines, but only to a point (Durst and Newell, 1989). As Applebee (2000) points out, different school subjects have different 'text structures' (4) or 'grammars' that need to be addressed in a manner appropriate to them. Britton's classification requires more distinction.

For a dissertation focusing on writing instruction in South Africa in 2013, it may seem anachronistic to give so much time and space to the writings of a British theorist whose most significant work was published in the 1970s and to examine his influence in American English education in the 1980s. There are indeed at least two decades between Britton's heyday in America and the present, but the impulse of Britton's work and the essential principles he proposed remain very relevant to this dissertation. As has been said before, Britton sought not to replace old categories of writing with new ones but to give credibility to the dynamic developmental processes at work in the young writer. Britton was among the vanguard championing the writer over the written product, and the categorization that he proposed, however problematic, supplied a model that gave welcome momentum to this vanguard. Britton does not provide a definitive overview of the field, but he does provide a very useful exemplar of many of the issues that will be picked up later in this dissertation.

### **Problems with process**

It is important to clarify at this point that what came to be identified as the 'process' movement in composition in the 1970s and 1980s was not a concerted effort to promote a particular theory. Rather, the term 'process' came to identify

the work of those theorists who sought to challenge and thus replace what they saw as the dominant writing pedagogy at the time. This pedagogy was identified widely as the 'current-traditional' rhetoric (Young, 1978; Hairston, 1982; Berlin, 1982). Tobin (1994) puts it this way:

The process movement, then, has been a rejection of a particular kind of product – the superficial, packaged, formulaic essays that most of us grew up writing and teaching – and a particular kind of process – write, proofread, hand in, and then move on to next week's assignment.

Matsuda (2003) outlines the popular narrative of how the product-centred approach of current-traditional rhetoric was supplanted by the research-led process-centred approach. However, he goes on to argue that the terms 'current-traditional', 'process' and, later, 'post-process', as useful as they might be retrospectively to trace the theoretical debate around composition, end up homogenizing the theoretical landscapes of those movements. The terms provide broad strokes but little of the finer distinctions between and within the different schools of thought. It is telling that those to whom the various terms applied generally did not use the terms to describe their own work.

With that particular proviso in place, there is merit in distilling the theoretical points that were seen to define process theory as they lead on to the criticisms levelled at it by those identified as being in the 'post-process' camp. Three texts at the beginning of the twenty-first century provide an illuminating discussion around the issue. Firstly, Gary Olson's (2001) 'Towards a post-process composition: abandoning the rhetoric of assertion' begins by recognising the positive contribution made by 'the process orientation' (233), namely that it helped to 'theorize writing in more productive ways than previously and to devise pedagogies that familiarize students with the kinds of activities that writers often engage in when they write'. Process theory, says Olson, promoted writing as something dynamic, encouraged student writers to be aware of themselves, their audiences, their contexts and their fellow writers (through peer reviewing) and prompted teachers to intervene thoughtfully and with as much individual attention as possible. Olson has no problem saying that process

theory moved writing forward, but he is critical of what he sees as its pursuit of an end point, a definitive account of what happens in the writer's mind that can be rendered into repeatable and predictable pedagogy for the classroom.

The problem with process theory, then, is not so much that scholars are attempting to theorize various aspects of composing as it is that they are endeavouring (consciously or not) to construct a model of the composing process, thereby constructing a Theory of Writing, a series of generalizations about writing that supposedly hold true all or most of the time. (235)

Olson's distinction between theorizing and Theory is important. Theorizing is a process of finding out more about something; 'theory building' (234) towards a Theory seeks to 'capture...a truth' or 'grasp...the essence of something'. The former exhibits the postmodern suspicion of meta-narratives; the latter believes Platonically that the 'reality' of writing is waiting to be properly described; the right Theory of writing can be attained.

Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch (2002) begins 'Post-Process "Pedagogy": A Philosophical Exercise' with reference to Olson's article, in fact, with the very extract cited above. Her intention is to give some sort of coherence to the post-process movement by, among other things, clarifying its objections to process theory. These she sees as threefold: process theory has reduced writing to a body of knowledge to be taught rather than an activity to be engaged in; the teaching of writing and writing itself have been presented as acts that can be 'mastered'; and teachers have reverted to a pedagogy of transmission rather than one of discussion (120). At the same time, she points out an apparent paradox in the post-process movement, namely that its subscription to anti-foundationalist and postmodern philosophy militates against it providing a pedagogical alternative to process theory: it can say what is wrong with composition teaching but not legitimately say what should be done instead. This paradox, as Breuch argues, is indeed apparent.

She takes as a point of departure Thomas Kent's statement that writing 'cannot be taught, for nothing exists to teach' (Kent, 1993:161), an assertion that would

appear to invalidate both the role of the teacher and the content of a curriculum. As it turns out, according to the post-process schema, the teacher is central to the student's learning while writing curricula are anathema to it. Breuch proposes that at the heart of the post-process approach is a resistance to any sort of formula that would allow teachers to disengage from the student's learning process. Instead of a static curriculum, what is needed are 'willing' (146) teachers, teachers who are prepared to 'listen', 'discuss' and 'be moved by moments of mutual understanding'.

Post-process theory does not prescribe a pedagogy and ask us to adopt it blindly. Rather, it enhances our sensitivity as teachers, our knowledge and expertise, and the way we communicate with students to help them learn. (146)

Kent is important to Breuch's case because he expresses so directly the post-process principles that have been seen to define the movement and so have attracted the strongest opposition. Her article is an apologetic of sorts for Kent and post-process scholarship, because she sees real value in their observations and does not want them to be dismissed as nihilistic. The post-process debate has the potential to revitalize the teaching of writing and she refers to Kent's three aspects of writing as a way of pointing the way forward.

Kent (1999) asserts that there are three features of writing that defy the efforts of process theorists, as he sees it, to reduce it to generalizable theory: writing is public, interpretive and situated. By writing being 'public', Kent is referring to the fact that language only makes sense because it operates within a social context. Language is not inscribed on stone tablets but rather slabs of putty that can be (and are) reshaped according to changing social contexts. However clearly the writer seeks to make her point, there is always the possibility that it will be misunderstood or misconstrued. Therefore, it is of little benefit to teach students that by writing A they will infallibly achieve B, because they have finite control over the *exact* meaning of A for their readership. Writing is neither 'private' nor 'predictable' (Heard, 2008:287).

The 'interpretive' nature of writing refers to the fact that we are constantly interpreting the world around us, making meaning out of what we experience from a subjective perspective rather than simply receiving it as objective fact. Knowledge is fluid rather than solid, and exists as the constant negotiation between existing ideas and new ideas rather than the collection of what is known. Moreover, knowledge is constructed, proceeding from individual and group interests rather than the self-evident nature of things<sup>10</sup>. This explains the post-process objection to the process-oriented presentation of a 'foundational body of knowledge' (138) for writing and its teaching. This underscores the 'indeterminate nature of the writing activity' and places 'an understanding of context, interaction with others, and our attempts to communicate a message' above reliance on any codified system of writing instruction.

Finally, the 'situated' nature of writing means that no two contexts for writing are ever exactly the same. They may be similar, but what worked before has no guarantee of working again. The writer needs sensitivity and responsiveness not a formula. The teacher needs to be able to gauge these qualities in their students not to apply a pre-determined model to the task at hand. The assumptions undergirding these features of writing, says Breuch,

are evident in assertions that writing should *change with the situation*, that students *interact with the world* through *dialectical interaction*, and that rhetoric involves interpretation of *social and historical elements of human discourse*. (139, italics original)

Again, what all of this does is to place the teacher and not a curriculum at the centre of teaching writing. In this formulation, teaching is 'an act of mentoring rather than a job in which we deliver content' (143).

In the same year as Breuch's article, Kent (2002) wrote a response in the same journal ('Principled Pedagogy: A Reply to Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch'). Kent expresses appreciation for Breuch's account of post-process scholarship, but

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<sup>10</sup> This is explored further in Chapter 5, where the name of Michel Foucault is inevitably invoked.

does make some important qualifications<sup>11</sup>. Kent goes further than Breuch in rejecting the power of theory in determining practice. Kent's point is that no theory has the power to effect positive change in teachers, because theories are simply ways of organizing and presenting beliefs. Beliefs are more fundamental than theories: 'theory cannot justify our beliefs, for nothing justifies a belief except another belief' (429). Thus, if teachers do not believe in the value of dialogue with their students, no theory – no matter how compelling – will compel them to change their practice.

A further indication of Kent's position can be seen in the following extract:

No principled pedagogy exists in the sense that we can stand outside our practices to discover a set of *uncontested* principles that will allow us to reject definitively one learning theory and to declare another the *undisputed* path to enlightenment. (429, italics mine)

Neither Kent nor Olson rejects theory out of hand. However, what they reject is the absence of conflict in shaping ideas and practice. Theories exist and have merit, but they must be prepared to be perpetually challenged and changed, and they must certainly lay down any pretensions to being definitive and universally applicable. Heard (2008) explains this in terms of Donald Davidson's 'prior' and 'passing' theories (287). Prior theories are those 'conventions, models, and rules' that are taught or conveyed through the channels of formal and social education, while passing theories represent interactions and experiences which cause us to re-evaluate and adjust our prior theories. In light of this, Heard says that 'the only way to really "teach" successful communication is to enlarge students' "prior theories" by exposing each student to as many different communication scenarios as possible' (288).

If there is any guiding principle, it is that of situation (or context): if writing must respond to its situation then the teaching of writing must itself respond to this situation. Kent explains what this might look like in actual school contexts by

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<sup>11</sup> Olson, also writing subsequent to Breuch and in the same year, makes the wry comment that Breuch's piece 'gets less wrong than other critiques do' (2002:424).

referring to what he calls the 'material conditions' of 'institutional economies' (431). The 'material conditions' are the resources available and circumstances prevailing in a particular institution, defined as a 'social organization of some sort that is structured to engage in a relatively specific activity' (431). The way in which resources and circumstances are organized is the 'economy'. Kent measures the success of any writing pedagogy by the degree to which it adapts to the material conditions of the institution in which it is practised. There is no one-size-fits-all pedagogy because no two institutions are exactly the same. What works in one context is not guaranteed to work in another. With a nuance index as high as is required by this approach, it is small wonder that the fulcrum for writing pedagogy is the 'sensitive' and 'retrospective' teacher (430) and not a standardized curriculum.

Lynch (2011) recognises the perceived contradiction of the post-process approach, namely that, as it 'rejects method' (261), it cannot be expressed as any sort of methodology or pedagogy, that is, something systematic to guide the teacher as she seeks to help students write better (whatever 'better' may be). In seeking to reconcile this contradiction he proposes that teachers practise 'casuistry', which he defines as follows:

Casuistry is a way of making decisions for situations in which two principles or rules conflict. It is the practice of sizing up a situation, discerning the extenuating circumstances, and deciding whether or not the usual rules or procedures should apply as they normally do. (263)

In this instance, the 'usual rules or procedures' would be those valid elements of whatever theories of writing are available to the teacher, be they current-traditional, process or post-process. It is an 'oblique pedagogy' (270), one that 'enables a conversation' but is not bound to either a particular theory or a 'specific classroom practice'. The only precedents that are set are those suited to the peculiar dynamics of a given situation. (Solomon was, in reality, only ever going to offer once to chop a child in half.) As a result, casuistry is 'evolutionary' rather than 'revolutionary' (272), reminiscent of Davidson's 'prior' theories which are continually embellished by 'passing' theories.

In this version of events, the teacher's judgement is, in effect, the closest thing to a substantiated post-process pedagogy. Lynch quotes Foster (2007) in saying that post-process is more of a 'sensitivity' than a 'position' (261)<sup>12</sup>. By its own definitions, post-process thinking cannot form the substance of any prescriptive curriculum because it cannot universally tell a teacher what to think or do in every classroom situation. The post-process response to process theory proceeds from what it sees as assertions of universality for the models of writing derived from this theory. Curricula, by their definitions, make claims for universality that are incompatible with post-process thinking.

### **In review**

At this point, it is worth reviewing the ground that has been covered. For much of the first half of the twentieth century, composition in American schools was focused largely on the reproduction of form and the correctness of grammar. The student's final written product was what was most important and little attention was given to how he got there. The 1970s were the starting point for a groundswell of research into the cognitive processes of writing. The aim of this research was to better understand what was happening when young people put pen to paper so that teachers could know when and how to guide them in doing so. The prevailing pedagogies of the 1980s and 1990s were guided or at least strongly informed by this research. In the mid-1990s and into the next decade, a school of thought developed in opposition to what it saw as the codification of the writing process into a predictable formula for classroom consumption. The terms popularly applied to these three movements were 'current-traditional', 'process' and 'post-process'.

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<sup>12</sup> In this way, post-process scholars echo the British 'maturity' advocates of the 1960s who championed the teacher-as-sensitive-aesthete approach to teaching writing. We are reminded of David Holbrook's assertion that 'if teacher training is good enough, you can allow schools and teachers to teach in their own way in England' (25). Heard's (2008) statement, 'The real power of postprocess theory resides not with its theorists but in the hands of the instructors who attempt to use it' (302), gives a sense that in some way writing instruction has done a full circle.

Research on writing naturally gravitated towards some sort of commonality of theory that could be conveyed as classroom practice. After all, what was the use of theorizing if it was not going to change what teachers did with their students? Some sort of consolidation was bound to occur. Lisa Ede (1994) points out how process theory became

co-opted and commodified – by textbooks that oversimplified and rigidified a complex phenomenon, by overzealous language arts coordinators and writing program administrators who assumed that the process approach to teaching could be 'taught' in one or two in-service sessions (35-36 quoted in Breuch, 2002:130)

Breuch references Barabara Couture's (1999) observation that the 'modeling of technique' (129) has long been the default mode for writing instruction, driven by a quest for correctness of written expression. Breuch also refers to Erika Lindemann's (1995) identification of 'what-centred' (128) teaching approaches which focus on content, and how process theory, for one, moved from being about 'how' to focusing on 'what'. Another full circle. The debate between activity and content in many ways defined the British and American positions at Dartmouth.

### **A long way from the Shire**

Given that there are problems in reducing over half a century of writing theory to three categories, it does present an interesting question: Did all of this actually change anything in the majority of American classrooms? The answer is, yes, with qualification. The qualification is that there has always been and always will be gaps between the theorising of academics and researchers and the actual practice of school teachers (much like the inevitable gap between policy and implementation that policy-makers spend so much time, money and rhetoric trying to close). The fact that research is valid does not guarantee it an influential audience with either the policy-maker or the teacher. Even when compelling theory finds its way into the teacher's consideration, it is often in a form quite

different from the insights that prompted it. This sort of broken-telephone dissemination of theory is really only surprising when it doesn't happen, given the various political and academic agendas it has to negotiate en route to the classroom.

A notable attempt to bridge the divide between the university and the classroom is *Because Writing Matters*, a 144-page publication of the National Writing Project (NWP). The NWP is an influential movement that is comprised by 200 university- or college-based sites across the fifty American states as well as Washington D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The NWP commissioned journalist and teacher Carl Nagin to state the case for writing in schools in a format that would be accessible to a 'broad audience of policymakers, school administrators, teachers, parents, and others concerned with education reform' (Nagin 2006:x). According to the book, 'university-school collaboration' (5) has been an active concern of the NWP since its earliest days and this book can be seen as effort to translate academic theory into practice. It can also be said that the book is essentially a rationale for the practice of the NWP for the purpose of propagating this practice through the American education system. The NWP is worth looking at because it is such a deliberate attempt to synthesise the debates of the 70s, 80s and 90s into classroom practice.

The vision of the NWP is bold: 'The NWP envisions a future where every person is an accomplished writer, engaged learner, and active participant in a digital, interconnected world' ([www.nwp.org](http://www.nwp.org)). The cornerstone of making this vision reality is the practice of teacher collaboration in which teachers whose excellence in teaching writing has been recognised are invited to act as consultants to other teachers, typically in seminar-type settings. This principle of 'teachers-teaching-teachers' (Olson and Land, 2007:298) proceeds on the idea that theories and techniques are most valuable to teachers when they have been demonstrated to work in actual classroom settings. While it could be said that the substance of NWP's theory of teaching writing is the accumulation of what its 'teacher consultants' promote, *Because Writing Matters* makes it clear that there are common theoretical threads running through its practitioners' practice.

One of the earliest indications of the theoretical leanings of *Because Writing Matters* (and, by extension, the NWP) is a quotation from James Moffett, who was both a precursor to and contemporary of James Britton:

Writing has to be learned in school very much the same way that it is practiced out of school. This means that the writer has a reason to write, an intended audience, and control of subject and form. It also means that composing is staged across various phases of rumination, investigation, consultation with others, drafting, feedback, revision, and perfecting.’  
(10)

The thoughts expressed here not only echo Britton but show an inclination at least towards process research with its references to ‘phases’ of composing. Nagin goes on to refer to both Janet Emig and Donald Graves, two of the figureheads of the early process movement. He also invokes – without explicitly naming – the work of Flower and Hayes (1981) when he refers to ‘models of how writers think when they compose’ (24) and the contributions of Bizzell (1982), Berlin (1988) and Trimbur (1994) in his reference to ‘the social turn’ (29). The fact that Nagin seeks to clear up misconceptions and misapplications of the process approach (36), provides a multi-page glossary of ‘Writing-as-Process Strategies’ and identifies a writing-as-process approach as characteristic of English language learning (ELL) classrooms indicates the influence that the process-oriented approach has on NWP philosophy. This is underscored by the ubiquity in the book of such terms as ‘planning’, ‘drafting’, ‘revision’ and ‘editing’.

Perhaps what is most important to note is that the NWP does not promote a single accepted model of the process of writing. The furthest that Nagin goes in *Because Writing Matters* is to state the following:

Most research today supports the view that writing is recursive; it does not proceed linearly but instead cycles and recycles through subprocesses that can be described this way:

1. Planning (generating ideas, setting goals, and organizing)
2. Translating (turning plans into written language)
3. Reviewing (evaluating and revising) (25)

Although the three subprocesses appear comprehensive, they are vaguely described and do not go into the sort of depth of the Flower and Hayes (1981) model. The salient part of this description is its use of the words 'recursive' and 'linearly', because once the dust had settled on the debate around theories of writing, what remained was a consensus that writing was closely related to thought and as such could not be reducible to mere cause-and-effect. In other words, just as people's thoughts do not queue predictably neither does writing progress uncomplicatedly from the origination of an idea to its expression in print. Indeed, one of the central rallying points for both the NWP and the National Commission on Writing<sup>13</sup> (NCW) is the way in which extended writing promotes learning. Writing provides students with a forum for 'logical reasoning' and 'reflective critique' (Nagin, 2006:24), a means of expressing, revisiting and refining thought.

Whatever the original intentions of those identified as 'process theorists', their work and the work of those subsequent to them was subject to Dobrin's (1997) 'pedagogical imperative', the impulse to extract from a body of thought generalizable principles that, as Olson says, 'supposedly hold true all or most of the time' (2001:235). It bears repeating that the apparent founders of process theory did not set out to establish process theory: the nomenclature is retrospective. Graham and Sandmel (2011) observe that there is no 'universally agreed-on definition' (396) for the process approach to writing but that 'a number of underlying principles...are common to it'. It is an 'umbrella' term (Graham and Perin, 2007:318) under which are gathered such features as 'extended opportunities for writing', 'ownership of writing projects' and 'personalized assistance and instruction' (319). Applebee and Langer (2009) offer the following as a tagline for the process approach: it 'emphasize[s]...teaching students the skills and strategies needed to write effectively in a variety of contexts and disciplines' (24). Graham and Sandmel

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<sup>13</sup> Its full name is the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges, an initiative of the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center that aims to 'ensure that the nation understands the importance of writing as a critical skill in academics and beyond'.

(2011) provide as useful an account as any of the definable features of process teaching:

- cycles of planning, translating and reviewing
- real purposes and audiences
- some projects occurring over an extended period of time
- student ownership
- collaboration
- supportive and nonthreatening writing environment
- personalized and individualized writing instruction (396)

These stress student agency and also echo the terms 'environment', 'climate' and 'conditions' put forward by Thompson, Holbrook and Whitehead.

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the idea of process writing has become part of the teaching landscape as more of an approach or orientation than a set of teaching techniques. It is an approach that provides the student with time and opportunity to think through what she wants to write, and to discuss it with teachers who are supportive and peers who are on the same journey. However, the prevalence of a process writing approach does not guarantee a unified application of it. As Applebee and Langer (2009) point out, 'Process-oriented writing instruction has dominated teachers' reports at least since 1992, but what teachers mean by this and how it is implemented in their classrooms remains unclear' (26). In fact, this is true of writing theory as a whole. Lambert Stock (2009) says that 'although a great deal is known about how to teach writing effectively, a coherent agenda and supportive conditions for doing so are few and far between' (6). It's not that there are no consensus about what makes for good writing practice, rather that there is no unified, coherent platform for disseminating these ideas (Applebee, 2013:8). The National Writing Project is a platform, and a significant one at that, but the fact remains that writing pedagogy is still contested. The ideas of the post-process theorists can be seen in the plurality of teaching techniques. The very fact that there appears to be no one-size-fits-all approach is in keeping with the post-process resistance to Theory, and the endorsement of teachers as being the fulcrum for educational reform (Nagin, 2006; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993)

supports the post-process assertion that the insight and skill of the teacher is the substance of the curriculum.

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# Consensus

## Chapter 4

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### Overview

There are distinct threads running through the discussions of the last two chapters, issues concerning English and writing that are common to the British and American contexts, and which, as we shall see, are common to the South African context. These can be roughly divided into factors inside the classroom and factors outside the classroom. Those factors inside the classroom refer to what teachers do when it comes to interacting with their students for the purpose of improving their writing. My engagement with post-process theory has left me a little gun-shy of the term 'pedagogy', but this is really what these 'inside' factors are about: the *teaching* of writing. Those factors outside the classroom have to do with such phenomena as academic research and theorising, curricula, systems, policies and broader social structures.

This convenient categorisation very quickly becomes complicated when one considers that what happens inside of the classroom is directly influenced by what happens outside of it, that research, theory, curricula and policies go a long way towards determining what teachers actually do; the classroom is not an hermetically sealed environment. Thus, the following qualification is necessary: when we consider 'what teachers do', we include in this designation what is *available* to them to do. For example, the debate around process theory was thrashed out – certainly initially – in the Academy but it came to provide teachers with a way to understand what they were doing in the classroom and certain approaches and techniques that they could use when teaching writing.

Forging ahead with this somewhat tenuous categorisation, there are four 'inside' factors and three 'outside' factors that I will clarify going into a discussion about the South African context of education and the curriculum that pertains to writing at Home Language level in the Senior Phase (Grades 7-9). The four

'inside' factors are as follows: contexts for writing (occasion, audience, intention); agency in writing (student); environments for writing; and guidance for writing (teacher). I would argue that the discussion around the British and American theorising has led to something approaching consensus in these four areas, that it might just be possible that if David Holbrook, James Britton and Thomas Kent were put around a table and asked to agree on *something* (anything!) in each of these areas, they could. Even if only grudgingly. Let me address each factor in turn.

### **Contexts for writing**

Students should not be taught to write to predetermined form but to adapt to context. It is their ability to recognise what they are trying to achieve<sup>14</sup> in a particular piece of writing that needs to be nurtured, not their familiarity with specific formats. In *The development of writing abilities*, Britton (1975) writes that 'one important dimension of development in writing ability is the growth of a sense of audience, the growth of the ability to make adjustments and choices in writing which take account of the audience for whom the writing is intended' (58). Mature writers have a high awareness of what has occasioned their writing, who their audience is and what their intentions are. It is this awareness in our students that we as teachers want to see develop.

### **Agency in writing**

This follows on closely from the previous point. The most essential motivation behind 'process' research and theory was to understand what was happening in the mind of the student writer. Holbrook did not approve of reducing this to mere theory, but I think he would have at least appreciated the dignity that was accorded to what the student was thinking by the best of such research and theory. Kent would also dispute any claims of definitive theory but approve of

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Kent would insist that the word 'trying' be used as he argues that there is no guarantee of ever achieving what we set out to achieve as writers.

the recognition that what the student has to write *matters*. Shaughnessy and Bizzell in their turns would endorse listening to what students had to say and write, provided that those listening to them remember that theirs is not an objective position but rather a socially constructed one. Teaching writing is not about producing automatons that can replicate generic forms but empowering young people to discover how best to articulate themselves through the written word. As Applebee (2000) puts it:

Because there are many...conversations that are important in our social and cultural world, writing development may in turn become a matter of developing a voice in a wider array of conversations, and learning to make one's contribution in increasingly powerful and effective ways. (6)

This does not invalidate the conventions of language use; it equips students to identify these conventions and put them to use for their own ends.

### **Environments for writing**

Thompson, Whitehead and Holbrook's emphasis on the right environment for writing, conveyed in the terms 'conditions' and 'climate', has endured to the present. Considering that most students come to writing at school as novices, it has been recognised that students need a good deal of encouragement in addition to whatever technical correction they receive in order to improve. *Confidence* is as important as *competence* (Magrath et al., 2003:13; Olson and Land, 2007:274). Just because they can speak English doesn't mean that they can write well, and just because they can't write well doesn't mean that simply telling them what to do will make them do it. The corollary is also true: simply telling students what they are doing wrong will not guarantee them doing the right thing. An emphasis on fault-finding does not promote confidence or competence. It is the difference between 'judgement' and 'response' (Harris, 1991:642) on the teacher's part, and while there is inevitably a debate as to how to balance these two, there is consensus that returning a student's work to him covered in red lines and cursory comments is unlikely to lead to better writing the next time round.

Allied to this is the belief that the more students write the better are their chances of improving as writers. Writing a lot does not guarantee improvement but writing a little certainly militates against it. Writing needs to be a regular and central part of what students do; the correctness of language that needs to be there proceeds out of this state of 'constant composition' (Graves *in* Nagin, 2006:22). A tenet of the process movement that has stuck is that writers don't usually produce their best writing with the first strokes of their pens or keys: there needs to be opportunity to read over and change their work to produce that with which they can be most satisfied<sup>15</sup>. The teacher is responsible for creating the right sort of conditions for writing to 'prevail' (Ponsot and Deen, 1982:8).

### **Guidance for writing**

The role of the teacher was the subtext to the theorising around writing in the 1960s through to the turn of the century. There was (and is) the tacit understanding that whatever was developed theoretically needed to find purchase with the classroom teacher. The issues in reifying theory into pedagogy have been outlined in the previous chapters, so this is not a bald assertion that everything needs to be reduced to methodology if it's to be of any use. Kent would never agree to that, and Holbrook would have something to say too. Rather, it is recognition of the fact that the purpose of theorising about writing is to strengthen the hand of the student writer and that the main point of contact with the student is the teacher. If there is consensus, it has to do with promoting the insight that theory offers to the teacher rather than the content it provides to relay to the student. There is agreement that the teaching of writing requires a high level of discernment and responsiveness from teachers to know when to observe and when to intervene. Thus it is that 'guidance' may be a better word

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<sup>15</sup> Debates about the nature of revision and its place in the cognitive processes governing writing are very much part of the general 'process' debate. My assertion here is not for a particular model of revision but for the fact that writers need to revisit their work, be it continuously, completely retrospectively or somewhere in between.

than 'instruction' as it carries less of a didactic connotation<sup>16</sup>. The student is not measured by his progress relative to a fixed, generalized model of writing. This requires little insight and initiative from the teacher. In fact, the student is not 'measured' at all, since the kind of interaction or 'conversation' (Bruffee, 1984, Lambert Stock, 2009) with the teacher required to actually improve the student's writing cannot be expressed in increments. This poses all sorts of problems for an assessment-driven education system which will be discussed in the next chapter. And, of course, it raises the question of practicability: where do teachers find the time to give this kind of individualized attention? One answer to this question is to point out that education systems are not valid because they are traditional or have become default modes. They are valid because they serve the ends of education. If current systemic arrangements are inimical to student writers receiving individual attention and if it is clear that student writers most flourish with individual attention, then it is these systems that must bend not the students and their teachers.

So much for the inside factors. The three 'outside' factors are as follows: the influence of political, economic and cultural interests on education; the tendency towards content and method; and the nature of teacher professionalism. All three have direct bearing on how writing is taught and assessed and all three need to be taken into consideration when reviewing and critiquing the current curriculum. Furthermore, there is inevitable overlap between these factors and those 'inside' factors just described, which again highlights the limited use of this dichotomy.

### **The influence of political, economic and cultural interests**

Education is one of society's most contested sectors. As will be discussed in the next chapter, it is a site of social renewal and determination, more often than not on a national scale. Those whose interests are best represented in education stand the best chance of having their vision for the future realised. We need look

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<sup>16</sup> Incidentally, it is Whitehead's term of choice (1966:16).

no further than apartheid South Africa for an example of how hotly the educational space is contested in order to determine the future. The apartheid government wanted low-consciousness acquiescence and so it instituted Bantu education. What it got instead were conscientization and defiance on the part of the resistance movement, most famously the students of Soweto in 1976 who recognised exactly what the government was trying to exercise over them by making them learn in Afrikaans. The Hitler Youth movement was fashioned to serve Hitler's military and eugenic ends, its tough-as-leather and hard-as-steel products meant to embody the Germany of which Hitler dreamed. The puppies in *Animal Farm* are taken away from their mother and given a secret education by Napoleon, and education is reserved later in the novel for young pigs to assert their superiority over the rest of the uneducated animals<sup>17</sup>.

Rightly or wrongly, education always has to respond to the claims of society at large. We can see this in the promotion of the cultural heritage model of English the Subject that sought to preserve the best of a culture through the promotion of its language in literature. We can see this in the Project English of post-Sputnik America. It is evident in the alterations to the chapters of the Cox report, as well as the setting of Attainment Targets in the same report, which are themselves echoed in the Adequate Yearly Progress markers of the No Child Left Behind Act signed by George W. Bush in 2002. This same phenomenon is observable in post-apartheid South Africa, specifically in the subscription to outcomes-based education. This educational approach is informed by a positivist, neoliberal philosophy which sees the National Curriculum articulated in the terms of a technical-rational discourse. The alignment of composition studies with the positivist discourses of existing bodies of knowledge has been noted by both Bizzell (1982) and Parker (1979). The 'scientific-sounding theory' (Bizzell, 1982:406) that results provides an 'accountability hedge' against the reductive claims of politics and economics and is intended to resolve the kind of 'legitimation crisis' (Harris, 1991:635) that an arts subject like English faces periodically in a neoliberal society.

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<sup>17</sup> And let's not forget that a battle for world supremacy was fought at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

## The tendency towards content and method

This can be conveyed by Olson's account of 'theorizing' becoming 'Theory' and Dobrin's 'pedagogical imperative'. It is the tendency for dynamic thought to reify into supposedly objective and repeatable forms that can be taken up for use in the classroom. Assuming that the end goal of theorizing about writing is improved student writing and that the interface between the theorizing and the student is the teacher, there is the further assumption that the teacher needs this theorizing trimmed and packaged as Content and Method in order to convey it to his students. It is the belief, says Olson (2002), that activities comprising writing can 'be specified and made stable' (425), itself arising out of the misguided conviction that theory determines practice. The post-process theorists would argue further that the value of a debate – in this case around writing – is in its movements not its conclusion, and that teachers need to be able to operate in this liminal space. Furthermore, notes Parker (1979),

in schools, we seem to be much better at teaching pupils about things than we are at helping them learn how to do things; activities give us more difficulty than circumscribed "bodies" of "knowledge". (34)

Parker's observation is made in the context of a discussion about Dartmouth, at which the sticking point between the British and the Americans had much to do with whether the subject was defined by *activity* or *content*. This tendency to forge static decrees out of contestable ideas is evident in the National Curriculum Statement<sup>18</sup>. As will be seen in the next chapter, it does not serve writing well.

## The nature of teacher professionalism

For good or for ill, teachers are seen as the means by which education succeeds or fails. In his discussion of the No Child Left Behind Act, Rubin (2011) concludes that the explicit and implicit message of the act is that teachers and not the

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<sup>18</sup> It could be argued that all curricula as a matter of definition do the same thing.

education system or larger societal forces 'are failing the youth of the United States' (4). Reform lies in making education 'teacher proof'. By contrast, Nagin (2006) proclaims that 'classroom teachers are the linchpin of all school reform' (50) and devotes an entire chapter to 'Professional Development'. This, of course, articulates the belief of the National Writing Project that teachers hold the key to educational reform, particularly when they are engaged in teaching each other.

It follows that an understanding of teaching writing that places a premium on the professional judgement of the teacher would necessarily place proportionate emphasis on honing that judgement through professional development. The converse of this holds true: the more prescriptive an education system is of what teachers must do, the lower the view of teacher professionalism that system holds. The National Curriculum is highly detailed and prescriptive of what teachers should teach and when, and so betrays a low view of teacher professionalism. This particular view of the curriculum will be discussed in the next chapter. The general importance of teacher professionalism will be discussed by subsequent chapters.

These points of consensus from the previous two chapters are not exhaustive, but they help to locate the National Curriculum in the context of a discussion broader than just that of post-apartheid South Africa. The following chapter offers a critique of the curriculum both in the light of this consensus and as a stand-alone document.

# The South African context

## Chapter 5

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### Post-apartheid education

The educational landscape in South Africa was dominated in 1994 by systemic and administrative change. The focus was on redressing imbalances between races (Samoff et al., 1994). Kallaway (1991) identifies the 'arena of education' in the early nineties as 'a key site of political contestation' as stakeholders sought to find 'new educational strategies to replace apartheid education' (3). Harber (2001) describes South Africa at this time as 'something of a laboratory or crucible for educational innovation' (8). Soudien and Baxen (1997) identify

the challenge of changing a previously fragmented, inequitable, and racially and culturally oppressive system of education into one that will satisfy the requirements of equity, equality, redress, and social and cultural empowerment (449).

This was the time for establishing a legislative foundation for the institution of a new curriculum that would be guided by principles of democracy and accessibility. During this time, the White Paper on Education and Training was published in 1995, the National Education Policy Act, the South African Schools Act and the new Constitution were published in 1996, the Language in Education Policy was passed in 1997, and the Green Paper on Further Education and Training and the White Paper on Transformation of Further Education and Training were published in 1998. Section 29 of the Constitution stipulates that that it is a responsibility of the state to make basic and further education 'progressively available and accessible' to all.

This illustrates the bearing that both political and cultural interests had on education in post-apartheid South Africa. In this instance, it was self-evidently necessary to subject racist education policy to the purging effects of a new democratic culture. What was less self-evident was exactly *how* this change

should be effected at a pedagogical level. The educational paradigm that underlined the new National Qualifications Framework and informed teaching and assessment at school level was known as outcomes-based education (OBE). The emphasis in outcomes-based education was on competency rather than content, on providing clear markers for progression (and promotion, in a labour context). Jansen (1998) says the following:

Outcomes make explicit what learners should attend to. Outcomes direct assessment towards specified goals. Outcomes signal what is worth learning in a content-heavy curriculum. (2)

The socio-political appeal of outcomes-based education, according to Soudien and Baxen (1997) was that its intrinsic accessibility could 'address issues of social change' (451). Outcomes-based education was the most likely 'model' to signal a break from the divisive and oppressive past and 'coin a new vision of empowered citizens for the future South Africa' (Botha, 2002: 362). However, the inherent benefit of outcomes-based education for the South African context cannot be taken as a given, as will be seen a little later on.

Educational policy is always subject to broader interests and post-apartheid educational policy was no different. It is important to understand the nature of the particular interests at work in this context as this will help to explain what is observed later in this document in the National Curriculum Statement. Suffice it to say that one of the key ideas determining the drafting of the new curriculum was that it had to produce (or emphatically promise) obvious and measurable change.

## **The National Curriculum Statement**

The National Curriculum Statement cannot be understood without addressing the central organising role of assessment in its design. Assessment is presented not simply as an end-product or 'add on' (1) of the education process, something to be done as a matter of course to rank performance. It is an 'integral part of teaching and learning and should be included at all levels of planning'. To

describe what this integration looks like, the curriculum statements specify five types of assessment: baseline, formative, summative, diagnostic and systemic. Together, these assessment types are intended to account for the progress of students through the education system as well as the efficacy of the system itself. Terms that could be used synonymously with 'assessment' in these various functions are 'monitoring', 'feedback', 'overseeing' and 'investigation'. Assessment is presented in the National Curriculum Statement as a means of providing insight into teaching and learning processes.

The central role of assessment remains in the first revision of the curriculum. The Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9 (Schools) Overview makes it clear that its aim is not to introduce a new philosophy or direction:

The revised National Curriculum Statement is thus not a new curriculum but a streamlining and strengthening of Curriculum 2005. It keeps intact the principles, purposes and thrust of Curriculum 2005 and affirms the commitment to outcomes-based education. (Department of Education [DoE], 2002:6)

This affirmation of commitment to outcomes-based education needs to be understood as a response to the not insignificant resistance with which the new curriculum was met. In academic circles, there were those who championed its cause (Musker, 2002; Soudien and Baxen; 1997) and those who pointed out its flaws, some even before it had reached the classroom (Jansen, 1998; Spreen, 2004). More important than academic critique, however, was the resistance towards the curriculum from the very people tasked with its implementation: teachers. That the Review Committee of 2000 recommended that the curriculum 'streamlin[e]...its design features and simplify...its language' points to the fact that teachers found it cumbersome and unclear. Accordingly, the Revised National Curriculum Statement was a pared down version of the National Curriculum Statement. However, the central role of assessment and the particular language that accompanied it remained.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, first published in 2011, seems at first to be a departure from what was clearly recognisable as outcomes-based

education in the Revised National Curriculum Statement. The word 'outcome' occurs only three times in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for Senior Phase (Grades 7-9) for English Home Language. Indeed, one of these times is in Minister Motshekga's Foreword in which she refers retrospectively to the introduction of outcomes-based education in 1997 and the euphemistically termed 'experience of implementation'. There is no clear affirmation of outcomes-based education as the continuing educational philosophy of choice, although neither is there any explicit indication that it has been abandoned. A 'review' has led to the curriculum being 'revised' rather than foundationally altered. Changes in categorisation and terms – the six 'Learning Outcomes' have been consolidated down to four and rebranded as 'Language Skills' – should be considered against the fact that one of the four sections in the document is given wholly to assessment.

In order to trace the place of assessment across the three curricula consider the following extracts taken from each of the three versions (highlights mine):

#### **National Curriculum Statement**

*Assessment Guidelines General Education and Training (Intermediate and Senior Phases) Languages*

Assessment is a process of making decisions about a learner's performance. It involves gathering and organising information (evidence of learning), in order to review what learners have achieved. It informs decision making in education, and helps teachers to establish whether learners are performing according to their full potential and making progress towards the required levels of performance (or standards), as outlined in the Assessment Standards of the NCS. (1)

#### **Revised National Curriculum Statement**

*Grades R-9 (Schools) Languages*

The assessment practices that are encouraged through the RNCS for Grades R-9 (Schools) are continuous, planned and integrated processes of gathering information about the performance of learners measured against the Learning Outcomes. The level at which the learner is to be assessed is provided by the Assessment Standards which are progressive from grade to grade. A Learning Programme, Work Schedule and Lesson Plan design should ensure that assessment is an integral part of teaching, learning and assessment. (15)

## **Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement**

### *Grades 10-12 English Home Language*

Assessment is a continuous planned process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about the performance of learners, using various forms of assessment. It involves four steps: generating and collecting evidence of achievement; evaluating this evidence; recording the findings; and using this information to understand and thereby assist the learner's development in order to improve the process of learning and teaching.

(74)

These extracts do not represent all that each of the documents has to say about assessment, but their overlap says a lot. All three extracts describe assessment as a 'process' in which there is the 'gathering' of 'information' about the 'performance' of learners. Clearly this working definition of assessment has been and remains foundational to the curriculum.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement frames this process in four steps (or five verbs), each relating to the 'evidence' of 'learning' or 'achievement' mentioned in each version of the curriculum: generating and collecting; evaluating; recording; and using. Assessment remains central in the latest version of the curriculum in that it motivates this cycle of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are positioned around assessment in that they are demonstrated by 'evidence' which is interpreted and fed back into further teaching and learning.

In summary, after seventeen years of curriculum development, assessment remains the organising principle of the national curriculum. At first glance, it appears to be a helpful orientation. In place of the fragmented and unequal education of apartheid we have a curriculum that openly states its commitment to a 'united and democratic South Africa' (Department of Basic Education [DoBE], 2011:Foreword) and describes at length and in detail what is expected of both teacher and learner. Certainly to a new teacher trying to negotiate all manner of variables, the detail of the curriculum and the authority invested in it can be very appealing.

However, the curriculum cannot be taken at this face value. There are at least three reasons for this. Firstly, there is too much at stake. The twelve million young people<sup>19</sup> to whom the curriculum applies represent not only a quarter of the country's population but also the future of the country. As the most substantive document framing this schooling experience, the curriculum has to be subject to scrutiny. The second point is by now obvious: curricula are never neutral documents. They are products of a matrix of political, economic and cultural interests, both national and international. We simply cannot believe what they say about themselves. Thirdly, the curriculum is a *theoretical* document and needs to be evaluated within the context of the teaching *practice* to which it is applied. What the curriculum predicts it will produce and what it actually produces are seldom if ever the same thing. It is necessary to take a closer look at what the curriculum is *actually* saying about itself and what it purports to achieve if the place of writing in it is to be understood.

## Discourses

The installation of outcomes-based education was more than just a self-evident egalitarian response to the oppressive past. There was a significant degree to which it was adopted because of the authority it conferred on necessary reforms. Spreen (2004) asserts that the political will behind educational reforms in the late 1990s and early 2000s had to do with the legitimising of the new government and establishing South Africa's profile on the international stage. Outcomes-based education was to some degree implemented 'to underscore the urgency for dramatic school change' (102), to lend weight to the reforms being made in the wake of apartheid. Jansen says the following:

[T]he origins and anticipated trajectory of OBE (and indeed other curriculum reforms)...was primarily a political response to apartheid schooling, rather than one which [was]...concerned with the modalities of change at the classroom level (1998: 367).

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<sup>19</sup> Department of Basic Education. 2010. *Education Statistics in South Africa 2009*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

Critics of outcomes-based education pointed to its ill fit with the South African context. As successful a model as outcomes-based education might have proved in developed countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada, it was always going to struggle to be effective in a country with a high developing index. In other words, it was a model established in resource-rich developed countries, and it can be argued that the 'impact of OBE...[could not] be equal in unequal conditions' (Botha, 2002:367). Thus there needed to have been more than inherent educational value to motivate its implementation.

The point of critique in this thesis is not outcomes-based education *per se* but rather the ideologies behind it and the discourses on which it draws. Had South Africa opted for another educational philosophy, it is likely that it would have been cut from a similar cloth to outcomes-based education. Outcomes-based education is itself located within a broader context, namely that of neoliberalism, the idea that 'the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions' (Giroux, 2004:495). Applied to education, this manifests itself in education being assigned an 'exchange value' (Waghid, 2008:20) and knowledge being accorded 'market value' (23). Giroux refers to how 'neoliberal capitalism performs the dual task of using education to train workers for service sector jobs and produce life-long consumers' (2004:495). Smyth (1995) points out 'attempts by governments to use schooling as a tool of micro-economic reform' (3). Wolf (1995) makes a link between vocational models of education (such as outcomes-based education) in the UK and elsewhere and the drive to build 'world-class workforce[s]' (xi).

One can view neoliberalism pejoratively as framing education as being merely in the service of government and business and their bottom lines. Education is not guided by high-minded principles at all but rather by the need to produce a workforce that ultimately serves the ends of a privileged few. Students are little more than 'bricks in the wall', as Pink Floyd so famously put it, and formal education is something therefore to be resisted and even dismantled. The rhetoric of reform and independent thought is not to be believed.

A neoliberal approach to education would find advocates among those who claim that in a free-market economy it is up to education to provide as many people as possible with as wide a range of choice as possible to pursue their economic freedom. Schools should encourage subject choices that open doors to tertiary study, preferably the sort that themselves open doors to employment opportunities. To state it in a more utilitarian manner, it would be misguided and cruel to insist that students 'follow their dreams', at least in the short-term. The dreams come later, built on the back of a solid working foundation. Education is a means to an end, not an end in itself. In a South African context, this argument is particularly persuasive. If education is rescue from poverty, who cares how utilitarian it is? To ignore this is to say to the man without clothes and food, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' and then leave him shivering and hungry. This question is worth an answer, one which will follow in due course in this chapter.

The intersection of neoliberal ideology and educational theory has produced discourses that have come to heavily influence educational policy around the world. In 1995, Smyth identified emerging worldwide trends in education as they are determined by international economics, including the following:

- intensifying the testing and the measurement of educational 'outcomes' through national and statewide testing;
- focusing on demonstrable, observable and performance aspects of teachers' work;
- defining competence in teaching according to static invariant standards derived largely from business and industry. (1)

The language that starts to surface is that of standards, performance and measurement. This demonstrates that, when applied to education, neoliberalism is traceable through the discourses it necessitates. Two writers prove helpful in outlining what these discourses look like and how they evidence themselves in South Africa's National Curriculum.

In his book, *The good teacher*, Alex Moore (2004) identifies three discourses used to evaluate teachers and inform teacher training. Each discourse is represented by a model of a 'good teacher': the charismatic subject, the competent

craftsperson and the reflective practitioner. While Moore states that each model of teacher has some place in education, the thrust of his book is to critique the dominance of the competent craftsperson discourse and to make a case for a greater degree of properly reflective practice. (The model of the charismatic subject is of limited relevance to this discussion.)

Central to Moore's argument is an understanding of the highly relational nature of teaching. He states:

[P]roductive teaching cannot be achieved in the absence of genuine understanding...which can be promoted and developed through constructive and instructive dialogues both among teachers and between student teachers and their more experienced colleagues. (6-7)

Productive teaching for Moore is one in which teachers play an active role in shaping what they teach and how they teach it. Teacher professionalism is largely the result of teachers in a 'public' (104) and 'collective' community of practice working collaboratively to define and determine what they do. Education is a natural consequence of this and includes 'actively seek[ing]...to problematise situations and to challenge existing views, perspectives and beliefs' (111). This supports the view that educational reform is a function of teacher professionalism. It is also congruent with the consensus that the teaching of writing requires a teacher who is prepared to engage and adapt to the 'situated' nature of student writing (as Kent puts it) and does not apply a broad brush across all student writing.

In contrast to this is the model of the competent craftsperson, which employs a 'technicist discourse' marked by, among other things, 'inventorising' (84) and the employment of 'scientific' language. Moore presents the dichotomy between the two discourses:

[G]ood teaching does not require us to internalize an endless list of instructional techniques. Much more fundamental is the recognition that human relationships are central to effective instruction. (25)

Active human interaction around the profession of teaching is inimical to the means and ends of the competences discourse. This discourse 'do[es] not invite us to ask such questions: [it is] not intrinsically inquisitive about teaching and learning' (97). A relational (read *reflective*) approach to teaching and teacher training makes allowance for intangible abilities, whereas in the competences discourse there is

a particular emphasis on evaluative aims and processes whereby the purposes and measures of success of formal education are very closely linked to matters of national economies, and where faster, more easily observable and measurable connections are demanded between policies and their effects. (94-5)

If the market is the organizing principle for education, relationship and reflection do not have the inside track, not only because the investment in time required lowers their benefit-cost ratios, but primarily because they are expressed in language that is hard to *quantify*. Relationship and reflection are qualitative and do not lend themselves to being conveyed in increments. On the other hand, the 'competences and standards' (102) discourses provide 'apparently value-free expressions' (30-31) with which to measure what is happening educationally. Teachers are reduced to 'clerks and technicians' (102) rather than the 'thinkers and creators' that they should be; the teacher is seen 'as technician and "deliverer", whose "internalised" skills can be easily monitored through measurable outcomes' (102). Such intangible factors as emotion, spontaneity and discernment are side-stepped in the evaluative process because they resist objective measurement<sup>20</sup>. This sets up this discourse in opposition to the teaching of writing, which relies heavily on the professional judgement of the teacher. In this discourse, teachers don't need to interpret, respond and make decisions; they just need to apply what has been decided already.

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<sup>20</sup> Education is in danger of replicating the assembly line that is both the zenith of industrial revolution productivity and the nadir of the revolution's dehumanising effects. In this scenario, the teacher is a grim parody of the lever-puller or wheel-fitter in the factory.

The consequences of applying this competence or technicist discourse go beyond teachers, with whom Moore is most immediately concerned. The discourse applied to teachers exemplifies what is to be done in the classroom. If the government engages with its teachers through a technicist discourse, it can hardly be surprised when the same teachers relate to their students in like manner and with like language. It can be illustrated through this statement by Moore:

Just like the broader market economy, so the educational economy concerns itself primarily with end products, performance and performativity, competitiveness and cost efficiency, in situations in which there must be winners and losers, profit and loss, and in which knowledge itself becomes commodified and teaching correspondingly technicised.

Teachers are the purveyors of a product. To the degree to which they are able to successfully sell this product and see it actioned through their students is the degree to which they are successful and so rewarded. Conversely, failure in the students is failure in the teachers (and, consequently, systemic blame is averted (104)). This creates an environment in which both teachers and students are afraid to fail. Students who don't 'perform' or achieve the required commodity of knowledge are excluded from the benefits that lie beyond. There are in-groups for both teacher and student from which neither wants to be marginalised. In his widely broadcast TED presentation of 2006, Sir Ken Robinson makes the observation that most education systems are run in such a way that 'mistakes are the worst things you can make'.

For the student writer, this is constricting. Firstly, the development of the student's voice and the striving towards performance standards cannot co-occur. To begin with, the incentives of each are in fundamental conflict. The motivation in the first instance is an awareness and authenticity that promotes a real chance for the student to enjoy both the act of writing in and of itself and the chance to use it meaningfully to her own ends. The motivation in the second instance is validation by an externally determined value system, be it the teacher, the rubric or, more likely, both. I have seen the anxiety brought on by students who 'don't know what to write' and fear 'getting a bad mark' for what they do end up

writing. The student learns to adapt, yes, but to a system to which she is subject only as long as she is a student. She does not learn to adapt to changing contexts of meaningful social interaction.

Moore makes a point of locating his discussion in the theory of Michel Foucault, whose observations on discourse highlight the difficulties of challenging the competences discourse. This discourse presents itself as self-evident, hiding its origins in the market imperatives of neoliberal ideology and claiming authority from its widespread and long-standing use. The very people it disadvantages are thus convinced to perpetuate it and any attempt to offer an alternative discourse must itself be couched in the language of the dominant discourse. Moore summarises it as such:

The real difficulty emerges when the competences discourse effectively replaces or severely marginalises other discourses by becoming the dominant discourse in and through which we instantly 'anchor'...or make sense of every aspect of our professional experience and development.  
(90)

In summary, Moore argues that the dominant discourse in education is that of competences. Its priority on observable and measurable outcomes is at odds with the relational nature of teaching – particularly of writing – but it is pushed through by a larger economic agenda, the hegemony of which makes it harder to critique and dislodge. In education, this is often experienced as a call to go 'back to basics' (Robinson, 1999:26; Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber, 2010:52; Lekota, 2010). As will be seen, this means that writing is rendered as a functional literacy, a grasp of the language that need go no further than basic transaction.

The second text to provide a handle on discourse is Stuart Parker's *Reflective teaching in the postmodern world* (1997). Parker echoes Moore's reference to a technicist discourse at work in education, what he terms 'technical rationality'. (This term will be used from this point onwards to capture what both Moore and Parker have invested in their discussions of scientific and managerial language. It conveys both Moore's 'technicist language' and Parker's 'technical rationality'.) Like Moore, Parker sees a dichotomy between this discourse (to which he refers

as the language of bureaucracy) and a discourse of reflection or democracy (4). While Parker favours a more reflective approach to education, his concern is to give substance and credibility to this approach and to keep it from 'spontaneously collapsing into a relativism in which *anything goes*' (5). That said, while the language of reflection may require careful framing, it is always to be preferred over the 'bellicose managerialism manifested in hierarchical lines of command and decision-making' to which competence-based education lends itself (4).

Parker identifies positivism as the philosophical foundation of technical rationalism, a philosophy which itself rests on the following assumption:

[T]he description and explanation of anything – including social phenomena – must employ the procedural and justificatory standards of the natural sciences...Knowledge...is only achievable through the objective, experimental, inductive activities of science. (9)

Parker goes on to say:

Positivism is thus reductive of a range of discourses or modes of theorizing; rendering all their statements into expressions of the language of science and their candidate referring terms as constructions out of the referring terms of science's foundational vocabulary. (10)

In other words, in order for something to be valid and validated, it needs to be expressed in terms consistent with that of empirical scientific observation. The emphasis is on what can be quantified and measured for the sake of comparison and evaluation. What is intangible must be put into concrete increments for it to justify energy, expense and time. This illustrates the tendency towards content and method discussed in the previous chapter and critiqued by post-process scholarship. This also foreshadows James Berlin's (1988) critique of process theorists on the grounds that their work buys into and propagates a neoliberal agenda, a critique that will be presented later in this chapter.

This also brings us back to the neoliberal idea of the market as the organising principle for education: the market cannot function without itemising and

quantifying its resources, be they the works of human hands or the capacity of human imagination. In the neoliberal paradigm, education is a means to an end and its constituent parts need to be expressed in terms that maximise its interface with the economy. Positivism is the justifying philosophy which brings with it an established discourse of objective observation and measurement.

## **Writing and the discourse of the curriculum**

There are two questions that now need to be addressed directly: To what extent does the National Curriculum Statement evidence the discourse of technical rationality? What does this mean for writing as it is presented by the curriculum?

That the National Curriculum Statement employs the discourse of technical rationality is incontrovertible. Its origins in outcomes-based educational theory and the continued centrality of assessment make it clear that it is essentially grounded in positivist philosophy. Even though the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement has drastically trimmed down its use of the word 'outcome', words such as 'evidence', 'achievement', 'standards' and 'performance' occur throughout the document to describe the relationship of the student to the curriculum (DoBE, 2011). On a more structural level, the document is a succession of headings and bullet points. For example, there is a list of nine 'specific aims of learning languages' (9), a list of eight 'approaches to literature' (11-2) and seven principles to 'be taken into consideration when teaching language structures' (12-3).

The degree to which this discourse defines the curriculum is traceable through certain telling moments of usage. In point 1.3(b), the purposes of the curriculum are described in a manner analogous to concentric circles, with 'self-fulfilment' leading out to 'higher education' and then the 'workplace' in which an employment 'profile' is necessary. The document then goes on to outline the capabilities of the learners the curriculum aims to produce. The preponderance of scientific and managerial language in this list reveals even more clearly than

the previous examples the influence of positivism on the National Curriculum Statement. It is worth quoting the list of competences in its entirety:

- *identify* and *solve* problems and make decisions using *critical* and creative thinking;
- work *effectively* as individuals and with others as members of a team;
- *organise* and *manage* themselves and their activities responsibly and *effectively*;
- *collect, analyse, organise* and *critically evaluate* information;
- communicate *effectively* using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes;
- use science and technology *effectively* and *critically* showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others; and
- *demonstrate* an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by *recognising* that problem solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

(4, italics mine)

The point is not that this list of competences is limited: that would be true no matter what the discourse. It is that it presents its subjects – young adolescents – as being primarily managerial and forensic; if they are not ‘effective’ and ‘critical’ then they are failing at the educational project set for them. It could be argued that this particular list is preceded by a more nuanced list of the principles foundational to the curriculum, a list that includes such principles as ‘social transformation’, ‘human rights’ and ‘inclusivity’; surely these serve to round out the picture. They do not. These principles are to be achieved by people for whom critical and effective organisation is the measure of their educational success. These traits are indeed needed *in the service of* social transformation and justice, but they are not the end goal<sup>21</sup>.

A further problem of the list of competences is that it *chooses* to express what it does in a manner that belies its limitedness. The scientific method and discourse – by definition – aim to reduce variables for the sake of certainties. The repetition of ‘critical’ and ‘effective’ is an insistence on the sufficiency of these terms: if a critical mind is applied effectively to life, it will, Sherlock Holmes-like,

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<sup>21</sup> A great many smart and forensically-minded people on the planet are responsible for the latest global recession and its associated aftershocks. Theirs was not a failing of a scientific, managerial education; theirs was a moral failing.

uncover the most logical course of action. Again, while critical thinking is of great benefit, *it does not stand alone as the measure of education*. As James Moffett (1994) puts it, 'the logical is not the psychological' (22), which is to say that rational-critical thinking does not represent the whole of human mental functioning. The development of the young mind does not culminate in being able to critically analyse.

A technical-rational discourse is employed unselfconsciously throughout the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. While the notion of assessment simply as a means of gaining insight into the processes of teaching and learning may initially appear neutral, a closer examination of its defining terms – 'process', 'gathering', 'information' and 'performance' – reveal how much it relies on the specific discourses of science and management.

This brings us to two features of the curriculum that are important to consider when it comes to considering the influence of the discourse of technical rationality on writing as it is presented by the curriculum. For the purpose of this discussion, these features are identified as *causality* and *artificiality*. Causality is the belief that explanation guarantees execution; if you want a task done, you simply need to provide the right set of instructions and it will happen. Writing is presented as working to a formula or predetermined structure. The curriculum wants to produce particular responses to literature and certain types of identifiably 'good' writing and it provides detailed instruction on both. Artificiality is what happens when knowledge, ability and even intuition are rigorously itemised and the work that it occasions is of an artificial nature. It is only valid and of use in the context created by the itemisation – usually the classroom – and not really much elsewhere. The prescriptive causality applied to writing encourages students to write texts that fill out the right boxes on the rubric but don't teach them much of lasting value about the scope of writing in life beyond the classroom.

These are not the only two features salient to writing in the curriculum, but they will serve as points of departure. Their value is in illustrating how the

application of a technical-rational discourse to the teaching and assessing of writing is in no way 'value-free' (Moore, 2004:30). Rather, it pre-determines what is best and in so doing *limits* rather than *promotes* writing; it dictates what is 'worth learning in South African schools' (DoBE, 2011:3) even to the detriment of nurturing true confidence and competence in writing.

## Causality

In the National Curriculum Statement Assessment Guidelines for General Education and Training (Languages), there is the following paragraph:

It is...important for learners to understand clearly why they are being asked to undertake a particular assessment task and what is expected of them. A clear statement of the expected Learning Outcomes for the task to be assessed will help. A clear statement can be generated from the assessment standards that explain clearly how learners will be assessed. This will help learners to focus their efforts *with ease*. In other words, learners need to be given clear instructions in a simpler language that *they won't struggle* to understand. (16, italics mine)

The recurring idea in this explanation is that of clarity: the word 'clear' is used five times in five sentences. What this repetition suggests is an uncomplicated relationship between instruction and execution. This is underscored by the confidence that 'ease' is the natural outcome of clarity: make things clear enough and 'they won't struggle'. This neat causality has been amply problematised in academic circles by, among others, postmodern and deconstruction theories. It is also patently *clear* to practising teachers that faultless explanation is not unfailingly achieved nor is faultless execution a given. To be fair, the simplistic assertion of this extract is not replicated in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. However, there remains a didacticism that is built upon a belief in the sufficiency of explanation. This is demonstrated in at least two ways: itemisation and prescription.

Itemisation involves the labelling of the constituent parts of an area of knowledge or a process and presenting them in a list. As has been indicated

above, it is no exaggeration to say that the document is one list after another. Every language skill, for example, has been thoroughly itemised. There is no doubt a link between this listing and the descriptors on the covers of the published documents: 'Structured. Clear. Practical'. The assumption seems to be that structure, clarity and practicability are best expressed in lists.

The issue is not that the document contains lists but that the lists it does contain are effectively its substance. There is proportionately little in the document that is not found in a list of some sort. Consider the following example. The Senior Phase document says that 'the writing process consists of the following':

- Planning / Pre-writing
- Drafting
- Revising
- Editing
- Proofreading
- Presenting

Each of these steps in the process is elucidated in a list of its own. For example, in the planning or pre-writing stage, the writer will carry out the following:

- Analyse the structure, language features and register of the text type that has been selected
- Decide on the purpose and audience of a text to be written and/or designed
- Determine the requirements of format, style, point of view
- Brainstorm ideas using, for example mind maps, spider web lists, flow charts or lists
- Consult relevant sources, select relevant information

The validity of the observations made is not so much the problem. Awareness of purpose and audience falls under the consensus described in the previous chapter. Again, neither is the fact that these observations are written in list form in and of itself problematic; lists can be very useful for presenting information in a readable format. The key point of critique is the extensive use of lists and how this reinforces the idea that *knowledge and ability can and must be itemised if it is to be taught and learned*. The assumption is that education is reducible to

predictable taxonomies and that this is preferable in order to make things structured, clear and practical.

When this kind of taxonomy is applied to 'the writing process', it implies that writing is a linear activity. When students carry out their pre-writing and planning there are four actions they must carry out before proceeding. By the time they write their first draft, there are seven points to cover to make sure that they are doing it properly. The rationale behind this linear approach is that writing is a discipline and we are teaching students to think systematically through what they have to write. These actions are ingrained in good writers – one can hardly imagine Charles Dickens with Victorian Postit notes on his bureau reminding him to 'Use main and supporting ideas effectively from the planning process' – but in novice writers they are not, and so they need to be ingrained through explicit use; the list in the curriculum document reflects the mental checklist through which all good writers work.

This brings us back to the idea of causality, the assumption that sufficient instruction – or in this case, itemisation – can and will ensure writing of a particular standard. This is underscored by the fact that nowhere before or after these lists is there indication given that these cover some of what is required for writing: these lists are meant to be exhaustive. In fact, preceding the list detailing what goes into the different stages of writing, there is a sentence that reads, 'During the writing process learners *should do* the following' (italics mine). The lists that follow contain eighteen points, never mind the forty-four points thereafter that refer to 'language structures and conventions'.

To be fair, while lists make up most of what the curriculum says about writing, they are prefaced by two paragraphs that articulate thoughts consistent with the consensus discussed in the previous chapter. To begin with, we read the following:

Frequent writing practice across a variety of contexts, tasks and subjects enables learners to communicate functionally and creatively. (35)

This is followed by references to 'competent', 'versatile' and 'independent' writers who are able to write 'for a variety of purposes'. There are two ideas in here that resonate with emerged from the British and American contexts, namely that students should write a lot and that their ability to adapt to context is more important than their fidelity to form. This is supported in the next paragraph where it says that 'it is only through writing that writing skills are developed'. This is consistent with teaching writing as an activity rather than as content to be downloaded in the assumption that it will produce writing.

That said, in the same paragraph the curriculum goes on to contradict itself saying, 'Writing instruction will usually involve working through the writing process' (36). What this does is present – as did the lists – the belief that writing can be reduced to a model. The six steps of composition are there to be followed and are equivalent to 'writing instruction', what it means for a teacher to teach writing. The teacher is once again reduced to the messenger and the student to the operant subject who will respond predictably to this input with the desired output.

The rub lies not in the fact that the curriculum doesn't have something valid to say but that its presentation betrays its fundamentally technical-rational roots. It says quite legitimately, for example, that the student should 'establish an identifiable voice and style' (36) and that he should 'get feedback from others (classmates)' (37), but this is undermined by the manner in which these insights are inserted as decontextualized bytes above and below an array of other bytes. The power these insights had for writing has been undermined by their itemisation. Ironically, the move to legitimate writing as a worthwhile activity has sapped its vitality by insisting that its pedagogy be expressed as a catalogue of considerations. This invokes Moffett again who states that 'taxonomy tends towards taxidermy' (1994:22). This is *sterile* pedagogy.

James Berlin provides further insight into the problem with how writing is presented in the curriculum. In his 1988 essay, 'Rhetoric and ideology in the writing class', he presents an overview and critique of process theory in a similar

vein to which he critically reflects on previous writing movements in his 1982 essay, 'Contemporary composition: The major pedagogical theories'. In his later work, he identifies two rhetorics within the process movement – cognitive and expressive – and one to which he subscribes and consequently distances from the previous two. His charge is that the drive of cognitive process theorists such as Emig, Moffett, Britton, Flower and Hayes to give name and shape to the thinking behind writing plays into the hands of a capitalist economy, which seeks to make commodities for exchange, in this case the 'skills' that comprise 'good' writing.

The purpose of writing is to create a commodified text...that belongs to the individual and has exchange value...just as the end of corporate activity is to create a privately-owned profit. (483)

The blindspot of cognitive process theory, according to Berlin, is that it seeks to uncover an objective and socially neutral account of what is happening in the mind. As was stated in Chapter 3 in reference to Gary Olson's critique of process theory, cognitive process theorists proceed on the assumption that the 'reality' of writing is waiting to be properly described. Berlin insists that this kind of objective neutrality is a myth, but one sustained by late capitalism to hide and further its interests. His answer to this kind of obfuscation can be captured thus:

The material, the social, and the subjective are at once the producers and the products of ideology, and ideology must continually be challenged so as to reveal its economic and political consequences for individuals. (489)

The teacher who uncritically accepts a theory of writing is complicit in furthering the aims of capitalism. The teacher who helps his students become aware of the 'discourse communities' of which they are part and with which they interact is being properly responsible (Bizzell, 1982).

The curriculum's emphasis on box-ticking does not agree with what writing really looks like outside of a classroom. The curriculum's insistence on taxonomy is an attempt to standardise the process of writing, and by so doing it mechanises writing. Writing is an exercise of the imagination not adherence to a method or

format. The end of writing is its effect or impact not the means by which that is achieved. The very attempt to plot out all that makes writing what it is from start to finish is to reduce writing to function and compliance, to render teachers as mouthpieces and students as glorified dot-joiners. In this arrangement, there is no guarantee against failure, only a more rigorous measure of it.

The didacticism of the curriculum is further demonstrated in what could be termed its prescription. In this context, prescription refers to how the document stipulates how students should approach writing in the thirty-two types of writing presented. Given that the document allocates on average about 95 words each to addressing the six types of 'essay', the nineteen texts it would identify as 'transactional' and the seven it would identify as 'Literary and media', it is not surprising that it has to make such definitive statements on what each type of writing is essentially about. This classification leads naturally towards value statements on what makes texts good or bad pieces of writing in their respective categories.

It was Britton who said, 'We classify at our own peril' (1975:1). Classification of writing is precisely what has happened in the curriculum and some of it bears resemblance to Britton's own theorising, namely the designation of 'transactional' writing. Whether or not this is a direct or incidental misrepresentation of his work is difficult to say. It is worth reiterating that Britton's model was not meant to provide templates for teachers to replicate but rather a means of identifying the uses to which students were putting language and the roles in which they cast themselves and their audiences through their writing. The terminology he coined was meant to be descriptive of what was taking place in the student writer's mind as he wrote, not of what he produced as a final product. Britton's terms were for research and not pedagogical purposes.

Britton's work aimed to correct a teaching of writing that focused on replicating a narrow range of forms (Applebee, 2000:4) just as 'process' theorists aimed to supplant the static categories of what they called 'current-traditional rhetoric' with an understanding of what went into *any* piece of writing. Indeed, a rallying

cry was Donald Murray's (1972) 'Teach writing as a process not a product', the very opposite of what the National Curriculum is promoting by presenting thirty-two different types of essay and telling students what they need to do to write successfully to form.

The promotion of 'process' over 'product' is not a contention that the work that the writer presents for reading doesn't matter. The final 'product' is very important because it represents an act of commitment on the part of the writer to being understood and/or misunderstood. As Frank Smith (1982) puts it, in its 'independent existence' the writer's submitted text 'can only talk for itself, and its interpretation is in the hands of the reader' (96). The connotation of 'product' that the process theorists wanted to avoid was that of teaching templates rather than the kind of thinking and invention necessary to generating forms of the writer's own according to occasion and audience.

The aim of the curriculum is to place students' writing firmly in the centre of what is deemed most accurate and appropriate in each category. For example, in the document's discussion of narrative writing, it promotes the inclusion of a 'captivating introductory paragraph' and an 'unusually interesting ending'. A descriptive piece of writing must 'create a picture in words'. An argumentative essay should 'express subjective and strong opinions'. The document typifies each type of writing in order for students to know what it is they should try to reproduce in their work. The implication throughout is that the prescribed approach of the curriculum is to be followed, and the consequence is that the teaching of writing seems to be back where it was before the process theorists began their work. This runs counter to the consensus that it is a student's ability to adapt for context that counts for more than her ability to replicate form. It is also in contradiction to the view that the teacher should act in relation to the student rather than a body of knowledge, in this case the elements comprising the different genres.

The application of all the theorising and research around writing is the teacher: the teacher is given insight into the cognitive and social dynamics of writing so

as to help the student towards writing authentically and powerfully. Britton's designation of poetic, transactional and expressive issues out of an understanding of how the writer positions herself and her reader in relation to the written text. This positioning determines what kind of writing it might be described as. As was noted in Chapter 3, critics of Britton's work have pointed to his insistence on a distinction between participant and spectator roles, which, if followed through to a conclusion, results in the kind of formal classification evident in the curriculum.

Over and above the return to a product-based approach, there are three criticisms that can be levelled at the prescriptive nature of the curriculum. The first criticism is that the curriculum contradicts itself. For example, it presents discursive writing as an impartial discussion of a given topic, 'an objective and balanced view of both sides of an argument' that nonetheless 'leaves the reader in no doubt where the writer stands' on the issue. The emphasis is on being 'lucid, rational and objective' and the statement is made that 'the best arguments here are won because they make good, reasonable sense'. The contradiction within this definition is obvious. The point of impartiality is that it does not seek to be persuasive, yet this essay ultimately aims to convince the reader of the writer's point of view. A similar contradiction presents itself in the document's discussion of reflective writing. At first it says that a piece of reflective writing makes 'no particular attempt to argue for or against anything', but then later it says that reflective essays 'present the writer's views, ideas, thoughts and feelings on a particular topic, usually something they feel strongly about'.

The second criticism is that what the curriculum encourages students to write is not always what it encourages them to read. It applies self-justifying principles to writing that are not appropriate to people who write beyond the classroom. For example, the document tells teachers to 'draw learners away from writing that is overly descriptive, adjective-laden, or simply gushingly over the top'. This wisdom is often administered as the antidote for students having been told in primary school not to use words like 'nice' and 'bad'. However, it begs the

question as to whether the same measure should be used to writers like William Golding. Consider the following passage from *Lord of the flies*:

Strange things happened at midday. The glittering sea rose up, moved apart in planes of blatant impossibility; the coral reef and the few stunted palms that clung to the more elevated parts would float up into the sky, would quiver, be plucked apart, run like raindrops on a wire or be repeated as in an odd succession of mirrors. Sometimes land loomed where there was no land and flicked out like a bubble as the children watched. Piggy discounted all this learnedly as a “mirage”; and since no boy could reach even the reef over the stretch of water where the snapping sharks waited, they grew accustomed to these mysteries and ignored them, just as they ignored the miraculous, throbbing stars. At midday the illusions merged into the sky and there the sun gazed down like an angry eye. (Chapter 4)

The injunction from the curriculum to ‘study descriptive passages from good writers’ makes real sense, but the scope of what is included under ‘good writers’ inevitably includes people who might, by rigidly applying the maxims of the curriculum, be marked down for not keeping it simple enough. It creates a scenario in which it pays to be Hemingway but not Tolkien.

When writing speeches, students should ‘use short sentences with simple ideas, using familiar examples’. What, then, should be made of these lines?

Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this Nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world. (John F. Kennedy, Inaugural address, Washington, 20 January 1961)

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. (Martin Luther King Jr, Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC, 28 August 1963)

The lengths of these sentences are not representative of the speeches from which they are drawn, but are illustrative of the difficulties of prescribing stylistic features as objective measures.

A third criticism follows from this, one that pertains particularly to the transactional texts. The curriculum insists on certain points of style and establishes them as objective measures. Here follow some examples. In the section on writing a friendly/informal letter, it states that students should write in 'lively, simple language' to their friend or family member, using 'informal to semiformal language, register and style'. While this might be generally observable, it is not universally applicable. I know nothing of my Grade Eights' relationships to their best friends and grandmothers, so to what extent can I reasonably tell them how to address these people? Am I in a fair position to evaluate how successful their piece of writing is likely to be? And what if they are writing on account of a tragedy? Is 'lively, simple language' really what they should use?

The curriculum is didactic. It extensively itemises what should be covered and prescribes best practice for thirty-two types of writing identified as most important. The underlying assumption is that – in the manner of Kevin Costner's *Field of Dreams* – if you list and describe it, they will write. What has been demonstrated is that adopting this cause and effect approach is no guarantee of good writing. Writing does involve discernible abilities and definable acts, and perhaps lists are a helpful place to start, but to present these lists as the substance of writing is inadequate. Certainly, to present them as substitutes for meaningful interaction with a teacher, peer or other appropriate reader is contrary to what has emerged as beneficial from decades of theorising about the teaching of writing.

At this point, one might argue that this is all a bit picky and pedantic. The curriculum document is just a point of departure, an overview of what needs to be covered. The curriculum doesn't actually claim to be exhaustive: it is a guideline. Teachers are professional enough to take and leave from it what they

deem necessary and to supplement it as they see fit. To look for fault says more about the critic than it does about the document. Having a go at the curriculum is popular sport among teachers: this is just another cheap shot. I would argue that it is not.

At the heart of this critique of the curriculum is the fact that it is a document produced in the context of an education system that needs to deliver observable outcomes to justify its role in shaping the kind of society desired by political, economic and cultural interests. The substance of teaching and learning needs to be rendered into objective increments and terms or else downplayed or overlooked. Education is subject to the same bureaucratic paradigm as any other sector of the economy. This paradigm demands documentation, which for education is the National Curriculum Statement, couched in terms of technical-rationality. The document is central because it determines the trajectory of whatever else follows, and for this reason it must strive for comprehensiveness and claim this even if it doesn't attain it. The curriculum says the following:

This curriculum aims to *ensure* that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. In this regard, the curriculum promotes knowledge in local contexts, while being *sensitive* to global imperatives. (DoBE, 2011:4, italics mine)

The curriculum document simply cannot ensure that every child who comes into contact with it will do all that it says. Neither does it have the capacity to be sensitive – it is by definition a ratified and static document.

The curriculum is a handbook for teachers. It seeks so thoroughly to cover the ground required for assessment that it requires little more of the teacher than to be a low-level translator. Itemising the process of writing as extensively as the curriculum document has done moves teachers and students away from the subjective, relational space described by Moore and Parker – which is conducive for writing – and towards the (apparently) objective, document-based realm of technical rationality.

## Artificiality

If causality describes the underlying belief of the curriculum in the power of itemised instruction to effect writing of quality, artificiality is a means of describing the nature of the written work that is likely to be produced by the instruction of the curriculum. As the term indicates, this written work is predominantly artificial in nature. It is occasioned and validated by the curriculum and resembles writing beyond school only incidentally.

A classic illustration of this phenomenon at work is Richard Braddock's 1974 essay, 'The frequency and placement of topic sentences in expository prose'. Braddock set out to test the assertion popular in textbooks of that time that students should write topic sentences at the beginnings of paragraphs in their expository essays. What he found was that only 13% of the 673 expository paragraphs that he examined in 25 pieces of contemporary professional writing began with topic sentences. Braddock's tactful recommendation is that textbooks and teachers should be more 'cautious' in asserting that students should use topic sentences, since their basis for doing so does not bear this out.

There is too much that is artificial about curriculum-directed writing. The writing occasioned by the curriculum is measured chiefly by the curriculum and its associated instruments and not by how this writing actually interacts with its intended readers. This is the inevitable outcome of needing to assign number values to pieces of writing, a necessity brought on by the technical-rational paradigm applied to the curriculum. Writing that is occasioned by the need to generate marks is both constrained and evaluated by the criteria through which these marks are generated. This can be seen in at least two different ways.

The first is the use of what is called the 'rubric', a marking grid on which are plotted the merits of a piece of writing according to certain criteria. Written work needs to have values attached to it in order to validate it within an assessment-driven curriculum. The rubric is the instrument of choice to assert objectivity over the subjectivity of writing and reading; teachers are required to

use standard rubrics to minimise variations in their evaluations of written pieces. Rubrics are another example of how principles of scientific observation are applied to non-scientific fields: the component parts of the piece of writing are laid bare and assigned value, and these are then tallied to provide an overall value for the piece of writing. The problem is that this is a school-specific scenario. You don't receive 'marks' for writing outside of school: you achieve responses. Your love letter elicits a coy smile. You're shortlisted for the first round of interviews. Your travel blog generates enthusiasm (or induces narcolepsy). That email to your infuriating colleague brings catharsis as you hit the Delete button.

Rubrics have to assume a certain homogeneity of readership, an assumption that has some justification in certain types of writing – letters to the press, curricula vitae, formal reports – but little justification in others – narratives, descriptions, reviews, advertisements. Even in the former types of writing, there is room for variation. Letters to the press differ widely in tone and structure based on the effects that are intended<sup>22</sup>. A curriculum vitae for presentation to a nuclear power plant really should differ from that presented for curatorship at an art gallery. Formal reports carry their own nuance based on what their writers consciously or unconsciously hope to achieve; the omission, inclusion and arrangement of facts offer their own interpretations of events.

Another way in which writing is defined by the assessment imperative is the writing examination. The pursuit of numerical comparison is the reason for the writing examination, that exercise in which students are told to produce their best writing in an artificial environment under more or less randomly decided constraints of time pressure and word counts. I can think of at least one articulate and thorough student who received a poor mark for the examination because she didn't get to Section C. To blame her for taking too long in the first two sections is to be patronising and miss the point. To say that students who are properly prepared for the examination know how to pace themselves is to

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<sup>22</sup> The issue of fracking in the Karoo, for example, has elicited jargon, sarcasm, blunt rage and plaintiveness.

conclude the very argument made in this section: the curriculum commissions the exam for its own purposes. Yes, people have to produce writing under pressure at various points in their lives, but considering that writing examinations account for over half of students' writing marks, they can hardly be said to represent reality. Writing examinations exist primarily to provide marks. The very mode of writing is artificial: students will leave school and sit at computers, typing one continually edited draft rather than a succession of rough drafts. The examinations provide little benefit to student writers except to teach them a narrow set of formatting requirements.

In fairness, the writing promoted by the curriculum is not universally artificial. With regard to writing reports, the document says the following: 'There is nothing worse than writing artificial reports, or reports on topics that have no interest to the writer'. The point is also made at the beginning of the writing section that 'it is only through writing, that writing skills are developed'. This rightly emphasises that writing is an activity that improves through practice and not just theory. In the section on writing a formal letter, the document encourages learners to write letters about actual concerns to existing organisations and agencies. The likelihood of response from these addressees will make the value of the formal letter 'obvious'.

This connecting of students' writing with contexts outside of the classroom works against artificiality. This directly addresses the problem of readership homogeneity and prioritises response over ranking by rubric. A similar suggestion is made in the section on writing agendas and minutes:

Writing memoranda, agenda and minutes are only useful if meaningful. The best way for these writing activities to work is to have learners watch a video of, or attend a real meeting and then have them take minutes, deduce the agenda from that, and then compare theirs with the real agenda and minutes of the meeting.

The idea is to replicate as closely as possible the circumstances which necessitate the particular type of writing. Similarly, according to the section on writing magazine articles, students should be made aware of the 'stylistic

idiosyncrasies' of magazine writers, who are very much guided by their 'personal likes and dislikes'. Students should write both 'serious' and 'funny' articles in an attempt to recognise and understand the contexts that occasion magazine journalism. Furthermore, the world of blog-writing is promoted as 'a rich writing context' which encourages students to pay attention to audience and tone.

Crucially in all of these cases, the measure of success is not a predetermined set of generalised criteria but rather the degree to which students engage with their writing and the authentic feedback that follows. It is the depth and sincerity of discussion and the insight gained by the student that really matters, not a numerical outcome.

### **In conclusion**

The curriculum is not without merit or benefit. However, this is not enough to override the dominant positivistic impulse of the curriculum *which seeks to present a complex and nuanced human activity in as itemised a form as possible so as to render it more predictable and thus more teachable and more 'measurable'*. The valid recommendations the curriculum makes are subject to the over-arching imperatives of an outcomes-driven curriculum. They remain recommendations and do not cohere into a coherent philosophy to challenge the technical-rational discourse of the curriculum. The same discourse that is applied to the sciences is applied to the arts, and the result is writing that is largely justified within the context of the curriculum and has little bearing on writing as an imaginative human activity outside of the school walls. Moffett (1994) says the following:

[T]he single most powerful block to improving schools has been this fortuitous match-up between the penchants of academic disciplines to break down and depersonalize subjects in order to study them and the corresponding societal penchants to break down and depersonalize education in order to institutionalize it according to our political, commercial, and cultural imperatives. (25)

It is this 'breaking down' of education into parts and increments that is evident in the National Curriculum and which militates against the genuine development of good writers and good writing in our schools. So long as the curriculum continues to be guided by a positivist philosophy and organised around assessment, the vast majority of our students will never reach whatever potential they have as writers.

It also needs to be reiterated that the curriculum as it stands holds a low view of the professional identity of the English teacher. It is satisfactory for the English teacher simply to apply the principles espoused in the curriculum. The teacher's breadth and depth of knowledge, capacity for creativity and interpersonal insight are auxiliary, not fundamental. The nadir of this low view is when teachers are required to be at 'training' which amounts to little more than making sure that they have read the curriculum. The message conveyed is that the virtue that safeguards education is compliance. The curriculum is as much a means of bringing teachers into line as it does students. The mechanistic role outlined for the teacher is a real problem. It casts the teacher over the student as manager of a production line, and it gives the teacher little or no incentive to improve or to find pleasure and meaning either in writing or in the teaching of writing.

What, then, should the curriculum look like? If, in its current form, it is insufficient for the purposes of developing competent and confident writers and promoting meaningful, quality writing, what needs to change? In the seventh chapter I present another revision of the curriculum as it relates to English Home Language in the Senior Phase, and in the subsequent chapter I offer some ways in which this curriculum might interface with practice in the classroom.

# Theoretical position

## Chapter 6

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### My perspective

My theoretical position has to some extent already been implied in the previous chapters, in the consensus discussed in Chapter 4 and the critique of the curriculum offered in Chapter 5, but it needs to be made more explicit if it is to serve as justification for reimagining the curriculum as it currently exists. It should already be obvious that the developmental theory of James Britton is a significant influence, as is the work of later writers such as Arthur Applebee and Carl Nagin (who articulates the thinking of the NWP). The appeal of Britton's approach in particular is its distinction between learning and education, that learning is something in which children (and adults) are always engaged and formal education is something that augments and guides but does not control that learning. When children write, there needs to be an appreciation that this is part of the processes of language development that have begun before they step into a classroom. The teaching of writing is about helping students to understand what they do when they use language in this way. It is about helping them to appreciate the possibilities that writing presents to them in terms of engaging meaningfully with both the world inside them and the world outside of them. The teaching of writing should empower students' imaginative and social faculties; it provides them with a means of representing and reflecting on the world as they perceive it and the relationships that define their being in that world.

A curriculum that presents the teaching of writing as a means of promoting compliance to set procedures and static forms is invalid on these grounds and needs to be fundamentally revised. What is more, a curriculum of writing that is founded, as the National Curriculum Statement is, on the positivist claims that the teaching of writing can and *must* be expressed in terms of standardised processes and products needs to be discarded and the whole project needs to be

reimagined. Its fundamental assumptions are inimical to the development of confident and competent writers.

My theoretical position rests on a particular understanding of what it means for student writers to move towards being mature writers, and what follows in this chapter is an explanation of that understanding. There are other points on which my position rests which will be discussed as well. The culmination of this discussion is a presentation of what I believe should stand in place of the existing curriculum, not because it is infallible but because it is true to the view of language development described above. It assumes that teachers are meant to engage with students as they develop in their use of language – in this case, written language – and are not meant to insist on models of writing to which students must conform. This engagement is typified in a willingness to discuss students' writing with them and to give them the sort of time and feedback that will help them to realise for themselves what they need to consider as they write.

## **Literacy**

My point of departure is the term 'literacy'. In their review of how literacy has been defined in European and American contexts, Resnick and Resnick (1977) make the point that societal expectations of what makes a literate person have changed over the years and that it was only around the turn of the twentieth century onwards that mass, 'functional' literacy (383) came to mean the ability to read and write for essential, everyday purposes or, as Resnick and Resnick put it, for 'work and citizenship' (385). This literacy is the ability 'to read common texts such as newspapers and manuals and to use the information gained, usually to secure employment' (383). Entry-level literacy may have changed from simply being able to sign your name or recite liturgy, but it still serves the purpose of facilitating interaction between the individual and those services and facilities of society regarded as important for the general population. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) identify this as 'low literacy', a facility with reading and writing that is minimally required to function in society, at least economically. At a primary school level, the teaching of 'low literacy' is not really even teaching at

all, but rather the 'exercise' (12) of skills that students already possess and employ in being able to hold conversation. This is congruent with the 'recitation' level of literacy identified in Resnick and Resnick's work by Christenbury, Bomer and Smagorinsky (2011:6), who themselves describe an 'autonomous' (7) level of literacy which presents literacy as a 'discrete skill' as opposed to a socially and culturally constructed and located act. Langer (2001) defines this level of literacy as possessing a set of 'independent skills or proficiencies that are called upon at needed moments' (838).

'High literacy', by contrast, operates at a higher cognitive level and indicates a level of not only verbal and linguistic but also moral 'sophistication' that befits 'leaders of society' (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987:9). With high literacy, says Langer (2001),

[s]tudents learn to "read" the social meanings, the rules, and structures, and the linguistic and cognitive routines to make things work in the real world of English language use, and that knowledge becomes available as options when students confront new situations. (838)

Christenbury, Bomer and Smagorinsky (2011) echo this perspective when they write that literacy 'is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use' (8). This is important for the teaching of writing as this strongly echoes the point discussed in earlier chapters that teaching writing is about the development in students of the ability to adapt for changing context. It is of limited to no use teaching students to learn writing templates by rote as this does not engage the cognitive faculties that they would otherwise use when writing outside of school. A high literacy in writing has to do with more than replication of form. If the teaching of writing is to be given any place at all in the curriculum, it needs to be on the basis that it is more than a collection of component parts or linear processes that when assembled or followed produces the right shapes.

In any education system that defines itself by its pre-emption of the civic and economic needs of society, low literacy writing is a given, since it prepares – or hopes to prepare – students for the functional writing contexts occasioned by these needs. To deny someone access to low literacy is to reduce his capacity to ‘secure employment’ (Resnick and Resnick, 1977:383). However, it could be argued that this is more a concern for English at an additional language level, since Home Language assumes a pre-existing level of literacy. Home Language is where high literacy is developed. Writing at this level presupposes the ability to adapt to context. Students with high literacy are concerned not only with being able to read ‘newspapers and manuals’ (383) and file tax returns but with being able to identify their audiences and be aware of their intentions in writing. They have the cognitive capacity to write according to ‘new situations’, to ‘apply...knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use’.

A writing curriculum that is designed along the lines of both low and high literacy is in keeping with the civic and economic demands that Matriculating students will inevitably have to answer. Low literacy is a baseline requisite in countless contexts, while high literacy, it could be argued, is the baseline requisite for most professional work. A curriculum that teaches writing for the purposes of functioning in society is entirely legitimate and indeed necessary. The objections that I have raised earlier in this thesis are not to writing being taught as transaction but to writing being taught *primarily* as transaction and to *how* writing for transaction is taught. My objection is to the assumption that the best we can do for our students is to prepare them as logical, rational beings because this will help them to get the most that they can out of society while at the same time keeping it running productively.

It could be argued that the National Curriculum Statement does not teach writing only as transaction and that it recognises the importance of writing non-transactionally. It presents six different types of non-transactional writing – narrative, descriptive, argumentative, discursive, reflective and expository – and accords essays written in these forms with a not insignificant mark allocation. However, these are still presented in bulleted form and described in cursory

fashion. For example, a narrative essay is 'largely the presentation of a series of events in some meaningful order' (40). By this definition, a narrative could be the list of instructions included in a self-assembly bookshelf. There is also no mention of the entertainment value of narrative, surely one of the most fundamental reasons why people write stories. Even the 'creative' forms of writing are subject to and pared down by a functional approach.

If literacy can be understood as referring to a level of understanding and engaging language, then there are two forms of literacy that need to be addressed by the curriculum, namely imagination and aesthetic sensibility. They are distinguished from each other to only a small degree as they refer to many of the same aspects of thought and feeling.

### **Imagination and aesthetic sensibility**

The reference to imagination proceeds directly out of the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of the word.

The power or capacity to form internal images or ideas of objects and situations not actually present to the senses, including remembered objects and situations, and those constructed by mentally combining or projecting images of previously experienced qualities, objects, and situations. Also (esp. in modern philosophy): the power or capacity by which the mind integrates sensory data in the process of perception.

Imagination is what makes it possible for someone to picture or conceive of something that does not yet exist and to manipulate it into any number of potential forms. Furthermore, it is a 'power' or 'capacity' – as opposed to a skill – that posits a particular relationship between the mind and the senses. It is the ability to make meaning out of that which is taken in by perception as opposed to that which is deduced by rational reasoning, a reliance on 'percepts' (Abbs, 1976:76) as opposed to the 'concepts' necessary for an apprehension of truth or reality by logical thinking. When someone says pejoratively, 'That's just your perception', he is dismissing another's claim to truth because he believes that person has arrived at this claim by subjective means and not by a replicable or

demonstrable exercise of rational thought. Smith (1992) argues that this sort of marginalisation demonstrates a misunderstanding of the essential nature of imagination as the 'fundamental condition' of the brain (46), the very means by which anyone can take in the world at all. The brain itself has no contact with the world outside the skull and so has to make sense of the bioelectrical 'clues' transmitted to it from the sensory organs. This sense-making is imagination.

[I]magining is something...that the brain does continually. Far from being an escape from reality, imagination makes reality possible...[It] is the creation of possible realities, including the reality we actually inhabit...The brain does not respond or react to the world; it creates the world...The brain creates the world we call *reality* - with the same imaginative sweep that creates the other worlds we call *fantasy*.' (46)

Imagination represents a working of the mind that is not synonymous with rational thought. If anything, rational thought could be said to be an aspect of imagination, in that the ability to apply reason to any situation is predicated on the ability to imagine that situation as it could or should be. The abstractions required of logic are requirements of imagination. Imagination accounts for both rational and non-rational thought, for both objective reasoning and subjective perception. It encompasses such qualities of the mind as intuition, discernment and anticipation that cannot be rendered as common objective realities. For example, the exercise of imagination enables you to 'feel your way' (Eagleton, 2000:45) into an understanding of something rather than reason your way into it.

An aesthetic sensibility is an expression of the imagination at work. It refers to the ability to perceive and take pleasure in the beauty of an object, usually a work of art. It is to be sensible to the merits of the *form* of something as opposed to its *function*. This is again an exercise of subjective perception, a working of mind and emotion that is not reducible to generalizable formula. In his 1989 essay, 'Aesthetic education: a small manifesto', Abbs argues against a patronising notion of 'the aesthetic' as something supplementary to proper education. On the contrary, no school education can be considered complete if it does not recognise the aesthetic as a 'mode of intelligence' (76) every bit as vital to human life and

community as the intelligence associated with deductive analysis. Education must concern itself with the development of 'sensation and feeling' (77), giving appropriate weight to the arts as 'autonomous forms of inquiry' (76) in order to give balance and coherence to any curriculum it proposes.

The National Curriculum, with its heavily technical and deductive discourse, is ill-disposed to give English the expression appropriate to it as an arts subject. It cultivates neither imagination nor aesthetic sensibility. The process of composition is presented primarily as a series of logical steps or considerations. Writing need not be intuitive and there is no indication given of what sorts of sensation or feeling writers try to achieve in their audiences, or why they might write for reasons other than the production of model texts.

Writing provides a forum not only for students to convey what they know or to become familiar with transactions outside of school but to explore and experience the pleasures of using language as a means of invention and imagination or simply for the sake of using language. To hold students to the view that language is almost exclusively to their benefit only insofar as they can achieve something with it is to impoverish their imaginations and make a chore of writing. If the transactional efficacy of the written piece is continually championed at the expense of 'the delight of the utterance' (Britton, 1970:126) then it is not surprising that students' writing lacks creative energy and the sort of vigour that might just spur them to be more rigorous in their presentation. To English the Subject falls the mandate of promoting writing for writing's sake, for establishing a writing culture in which it is commonplace, for example, for students to publish both prose and poetry for the sole purpose of contributing to an anthology (the classroom wall, a book, a blog or something else). The prime readership of this work is anyone who cares to read it but, crucially, not the marking teacher. This creates a forum in which the intuitive and subjective nature of writing – its aesthetic features – can be explored without fear of censure. If the curriculum in its current form does allow for this, then it does so to a very limited degree, directed as it is to make the subjective objective and the intangible measurable.

If writing is to be taught at all, it must be taught properly. It cannot be taught disengaged from subjective sense, as being somehow impervious to human mercuriality. There is an aesthetic quality to most writing – if I were bolder I would say ‘all’ – in the sense that writing requires anticipation and discernment, neither of which can be entirely derived by deductive means. The assertion that there is ‘creative’ or ‘imaginative’ writing and then a kind of transactional writing that arises out of some other faculty is wrong. All writing requires creativity and imagination. Invention is not at odds with function. It could be argued that even the most significant written texts in the field of science could not be so considered were it not for their writers’ inventiveness with language, their ability to describe in original and meaningful terms what they observe. The dichotomy between function and imagination in writing is unsustainable and students are done a disservice when it is taught as fact. They are done further disservice when they are made suspicious of their own intuition and subjective sense instead of being helped to understand how these are always at work as they write and how they might follow them in ways that augment and improve their writing.

This is not a naïve acceptance that whatever students write is of high quality and that what they need are not teachers but back-patters. As will be discussed, writing has value and can be evaluated. What I am saying is that the value of a student’s writing has to be apparent to the student in order for its application to help her in any way. The use of a standardised rubric has limited benefit in helping the student mature as a writer. When teachers operate in their full professional capacity as mature readers who imagine themselves as the potential audiences for their students’ work and who humbly give account of why they have read their students’ work as they have, rubrics are superfluous. The rubric is a means of standardisation when what is needed is an insightful and responsive audience. If this is the teacher, then she joins with the student as writer in imagining an audience greater than herself and engages in conversation with him about what he is writing.

When students are taught that writing requires the exercise of not only logical intellect but also subjective intuition, they are better equipped to produce writing that does not face the charge of artificiality outlined in Chapter 5. The writing promoted by the curriculum is artificial because it presents features of what it believes constitutes each form of writing and assumes that fidelity to them produces authentic texts, which it does not. The focus in the curriculum is on reproducing form and the recipe for doing so does not bake the cake in the picture. If the focus is on creatively imagining context and the writer is being constantly encouraged to anticipate and discern audience, occasion and intention, then the chances are that when they have to write for whatever contexts arise, they will be better prepared to write appropriately. The aim is not to teach writing to equip students for the 'world out there'. The aim is to teach writing. Writing is writing. It requires awareness and anticipation, a sense of writing *from* context and writing *into* context. It requires an appreciation of the idiosyncratic, unpredictable and surprising nature of language, even in its most controlled forms. If students can be helped to discover this as they write, then I think English teachers have done the greater part of their job. Writing is not the preserve of the education system and neither teachers nor rubrics should ever claim or exercise monopoly of meaning over student writers.

There is a further implication of all of this that relates directly back to English the Subject. The primary means of assessing students' knowledge of and engagement with literature is through the answering of short-answer questions. (At Further Education and Training level, they also need to write literary essays.) They are required to write forensically in response to writing that is written to achieve an aesthetic response. To employ Britton's terminology, they are made to write as participants in response to writing that actively casts them as spectators. This is again using writing to have students show what they know, which would be fine if it were one of the kinds of writing that literature occasioned for them. As it stands, this 'restricted' or 'transactional' writing constitutes almost the entirety of writing occasioned by literary studies in the curriculum. There is passing reference to how creative writing should be 'closely attached to the study of any literary text' (10), but this is not borne out by or elaborated on in the section on

writing. It is through the writing of literature tests and examinations that students display their engagement with literature. This militates against one of the very reasons for which literature is included in the school programme, namely to engage and sharpen student's aesthetic sensibilities. However inventive teachers may be in their teaching of literature, insistence on gauging students' engagement with literature by having them exclusively dissect its meaning in a quasi-scientific manner tells them that what literature is good for is to teach them something. Literature then need not mean much more to them than a content that they need to learn for examination purposes. Students need not respond to literature intuitively or subjectively, which is surely one of the most basic reasons why people write and read it.

### **The place of writing**

As was discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the history of writing in the subject of English and education at large is one of moving from the periphery to the centre. Initial concerns with English in school were to do with functional literacy and then later with literary studies. Writing only started to be championed as an activity with its own intrinsic developmental and educational merits towards the last three decades of the twentieth century. One culmination of this was the National Writing Project publishing *Because Writing Matters*, whose central theses are that 'students need to write more across all content areas and that schools need to expand their writing curricula to involve students in a range of writing tasks' (Nagin, 2006:6). These are the guiding principles of the 'writing to learn' or 'writing across the curriculum' movements. The NWP's concern with writing is not limited to English the Subject but the fact that 'writing matters' across the educational spectrum means that it must be a central focus of English as a language subject. The implication is that if English teachers can engage with their students in such ways as to develop quality writing then students are educationally advantaged across the board. That said, it must be remembered that writing is about more than its utility to other pursuits. The development of writing ability is the development of a fundamentally human capacity for language and thought, and the urgency of teaching it appropriately is a question

of democratic access. Writing matters because it is writing, and it is in the subject of English that this is most fully explored.

The point here is one that needs to be made as simply and accurately as possible, because it is foundational to any reimagining of the curriculum. Writing is not incidental to the subject of English: it is a central, defining activity. Writing is not primarily something that is occasioned by the need to find out what students know, but is something that is done because it has value in its own right.

Students should write much and often in English as a matter of course not as a matter of convenience. Their expectation of English as a subject is that they write and that they write a lot. What then happens with them with regard to literature, language and, to an extent, oral ability takes its lead from writing and the expectation that students' engagement with these other features of the English classroom inevitably leads to writing. The development of student writers towards maturity – namely, high literacy, imagination and aesthetic sensibility – is the most significant investment teachers, administrators and policy-makers can make in English Home Language.

Writing, speaking, reading and listening all require active participation. They are also all generative activities in the sense that to engage in them is to in some way create meaning. Writing and speaking offer the greatest opportunities to create meaning in ways that reflect the character of the person involved and to give that person chance to provoke further ideas in others. It might then be convenient to say that speech and writing are essentially the same thing and differ only in delivery. The extension of this line of thinking is to conclude that writing is simply speech transcribed. While there are obvious similarities, they need to be recognised as two distinct uses of language. Smith (1982) says the following:

[N]ot only can writing separate the producer of language from its recipient in time and space, with the possibility of reflection and review, but writing can also separate the producer from him or herself, so that one's own ideas can be examined more objectively. Writers can look at the language they produce in a way that speakers cannot. (16)

It is the potential that writing offers for editing or revision – for ‘looking at language’ – that sets it apart from spoken language (Emig, 2003; Sommers, 1980) and favours it for a more definitive role in the English curriculum. While there is undoubted benefit in oral discussion and debate of an immediate social nature that writing cannot necessarily replicate, the unique reflective qualities of writing place it at the heart of how English as a subject relates to the development of language ability. The growth of students towards maturity in language use is predicated on their understanding and exercise of writing in reflecting on that language use. It is worth noting that much that is required of students in terms of formal speech relies on them being able to articulate their thoughts beforehand in writing.

The placing of writing at the centre is cause to rethink the place and nature of both language and literary studies. A writing-centred curriculum questions the fundamental assumptions behind the inclusion of grammar and literature and the ways in which they are taught. There has been and continues to be a long debate about how grammar should be taught, if at all. The one pole of the debate is that grammar should be taught as a set of rules to be memorized and drilled in decontextualized exercises. The opposite pole is that grammar should only be taught as it arises in individual students’ writing. Barton (1998) comments that this debate has usually been reduced to ‘easy juxtapositions’ (4) and does not amount to a properly researched and ‘serious’ discussion about how grammar should be taught. Myhill (2005) observes that there is no conclusive evidence for the benefit of ‘explicit’ (88) teaching of grammar, nor has there been adequate research into a more contextual approach to vouch for or discount its efficacy. Hudson and Walmsley (2005) trace the history of grammatical instruction through twenty-first-century Britain and note that there remains much to be researched about the role that direct instruction plays in children’s language development.

Barton (1998) argues that the explicit teaching of grammar provides a ‘systematic framework for grammatical development’ (9) that helps teachers to discern how their students are progressing. This development of a

'metalanguage' (Hudson, 2004:106; DoBE, 2011:37) is seen to give students the terms needed to reflect on their writing. There is agreement that if there is to be direct instruction it needs to be of a substantively different sort to the decontextualized, rules-based teaching of the 'traditional' or 'prescriptive' grammar typical of English textbooks and classes in the first half of the twentieth century. This 'deficit' model (Myhill, 2005:78) was predicated on the assumption that grammar could be taught as a set of rules of correct use and its emphasis was on avoiding contravention of these rules. This assumption of 'right' and 'wrong' has been opposed on the grounds that grammar simply describes the conventions of a language that is subject to changes that will supplant these conventions with others (Hudson, 2004; Smith, 1982). The upshot of this argument for teaching is that grammar should be 'descriptive' and not 'prescriptive' (Hudson and Walmsley, 2005:610).

In a writing-centred curriculum, everything that is taught to students about grammar only has value when it is put into use, and the principal way for students to demonstrate their understanding of grammar is in their writing. Grammar only matters at secondary school level because of its ability to enhance language use, principally writing, and not because it is a body of knowledge in and of itself. The vast majority of writers – even brilliant writers – do not pursue linguistics or philology outside of school, and their concern is with writing meaningfully in ways that can be understood by their particular audiences. Their understanding of grammar is of use to them in this regard and no other. When a student writes, he has to put whatever he has learned about language into use. It is writing that best demonstrates a student's facility in language. In this arrangement, write Hudson and Walmsley, 'grammar is a resource, not a limitation, and...the aim of teaching...[is] to expand that resource rather than to teach children to avoid errors' (2005:610).

It was argued in the previous section that requiring an almost exclusively forensic or analytical use of language in response to literature is misguided. It indicates that one of the main reasons that literature is included in the curriculum is to provide content, a body of knowledge with which students need

to show familiarity and insight. The proliferation of study guides bears this out, as students seek to learn what has been established in terms of plot, theme, character, structure and so on. The danger in this is that the nature of literature as something provocative, entertaining, moving or subversive becomes secondary to what is standard. The essential problem is that the relationship of the student to the literary text promoted by the curriculum bears no meaningful resemblance to how people actually engage with literature outside of school. Writers outside of school who write in response to literature have a freedom of thought denied to students. Readings of literature in school are convergent rather than divergent and writing in response to literature is then necessarily expository in nature and needs to demonstrate a student's knowledge of literary texts in relation to accepted convergent readings. The imperative for measurable content knowledge sees to this.

Any pedagogical approach to literature in schools has to encourage students to explore literature as something open-ended and subject to different readings. Outside of school, people read, respond to, discuss and debate what they have read. They refer to the text to make their points. They refer, mimic, quote and parody, reproducing literature in their own forms. There are no rules for how people respond to literature outside of school and it does not make sense to impose restrictions on students' responses to literature that only make sense in the school environment. Literature is a realm in culture in which ideas do not settle to conformity but where they are given voice and scope in all of their variety, complication and consequence. Literature presents opportunity to its readers to enter into this conversation and allows them to encounter different worlds of ideas to which they would otherwise not have had access. It is an exploration and experiment with language, making possible in words what would otherwise not exist. A writing-centred curriculum is not a diminishing of these qualities of literature but an *entering into* of them. The student writer is not on the outside looking in, trying to explain what she sees. She is given the freedom and the means by her teacher to participate as a writer in the conversation of literature; she has a lot to learn as well as something to contribute. The focus is still the student as writer, as someone who has reason to

write and choices as to how to write. The inherent provocation of literature gives reason and its many forms present choices as to what the resultant writing might look like. The student writer writes *because* of literature not *about* it (Bakker, personal communication 2013, August 7) and in it finds possibilities for expression not prescriptions. Whatever else might be done with literature in the classroom, it must give rise to writing of volume and variety.

The place of writing is at the centre of the English curriculum. This requires a fundamental shift in thinking about what students learn and do in English class and how successfully they are judged to be learning and doing this. The roles of the curriculum, the teacher and assessment are all implicated in this shift.

### **The role of the curriculum**

In Chapter 5, I made the assertion that the curriculum in its current form is a handbook for teachers, a treatment of the content of the subject intended to be so comprehensive that little more is required from teachers than to convey it faithfully to their students. This is how the curriculum presents itself. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for Grades 7-9 English Home Language says of itself that it 'gives expression to the knowledge, skills and values worth learning in South African schools' (DoBE, 2011:4). The implication is that teachers need not attend to what is not in the curriculum, namely that which is not worth learning. All they need to know is bound in the 142 pages of the curriculum document. Furthermore, it provides teaching plans for every week of the teaching year as well as programmes of assessment that detail what needs to be evaluated and in which term. To be fair, the time allocations indicated in the curriculum are 'recommended' (12) and teachers 'do not have to stick rigidly' to them. The sequence of content in the teaching plans is 'not prescribed' (55), although the teaching plans indicate 'minimum content'.

For teachers, the curriculum is potentially both a blessing and a curse. For new teachers and teachers who teach one or two classes of English in addition to classes in other subjects, it provides something for them to work from and gives

them an assurance that they are doing what is required of them. As problematic as the lists are, they do provide an overview of what is typically regarded as the content of English and by so doing direct teachers to what they need to cover. The curriculum unmistakably demonstrates input from English educators who have put in the think work around what a beginner teacher should teach. Therein lies the curse. It sounds crude and harsh, but there is no other way to put it: the curriculum caters to the lower common denominator. Its treatment of writing is evident of this. The reduction of writing to forms and checklists doesn't require interpretation but application. The ability and insight of the teacher using the curriculum to teach writing need only be of a functional level.

The writing curriculum needs to be discarded. Its cause-and-effect approach to teaching writing is wrong and needs to be replaced. The curriculum cannot guarantee confidence and competence in student writers nor can it ensure meaningful and quality writing. What it can do is to tell stories of writing and how it has been and is taught, and to encourage teachers to engage with this in whatever ways are most available to them. The curriculum cannot exist as a stand-alone determinant of writing and it should not presume to be able to do so.

### **The role of the teacher**

By now it is clear that the teaching of writing is not the delivery of a content, the conveyance of a body of knowledge that when mentally ingested produces the desired written result. In other words, the role of the teacher is not determined in relation to a static curriculum. The teacher is neither the messenger nor the translator. Neither is it tenable for the teacher to be the quality controller at the end of the pre-determined process, placing a numerical value on what has been produced. These roles might see that writing gets done and are relevant to generating marks, but they have little impact on how students write. This is a parody of the teacher's role that is not, strictly speaking, consistent with what is spelled out for the teacher in the curriculum, but it is consistent with the reality of teachers who have to mark the written work of, say, five classes of twenty-five students each, a conservative estimate. The curriculum's extensive itemisation

and reliance on explicit process is complicit in this in that it seeks to make the production of and feedback on written work as systematic as possible.

To give students the best chance of writing purposefully, it has to be acknowledged that it is not going to happen so long as there is the belief that this happens when they are at the receiving end of content rather than individual attention. If students are to be genuinely served as developing writers, there has to be time in which they can receive individualized attention from at least one professional quarter. The teacher is the most obvious choice, but, practically, other people with insight and expertise might have to be drawn in. Student writers will not improve so long as they receive the edges of their teachers' time and energy. It is not legitimate to continue to cast the teacher in the role of sole respondent and to promote a convenient production line view of writing that tries to make this work.

### **The nature of assessment**

The assessment-driven nature of the curriculum further militates against purposeful and meaningful writing. As was argued earlier in this chapter, the aesthetic aspects of writing are not supported by a curriculum that seeks to make the subjective objective and the intuitive predictable and measurable. The application of 'standard' rubrics conveys the idea that the full quality of a piece of writing can be accounted for with the right instrument. The contemplated alternative to the rubric, it would seem, is an unquantifiable relativity that is unfair to those students whose writing is better than others. The real problem is that once education has become guided by the neoliberal demand for increments, and convinced of both the need for them and the positivistic assurance that they can be derived, the rubric is a logical conclusion.

The language of the curriculum in describing assessment has been discussed in Chapter 5, but it is worth remembering that such words as 'performance', 'achievement' and 'evidence' have recurred in all versions of the curriculum. They point to the distinctly managerial slant that teachers are meant to take on

assessment, that they are looking for externals and deliverables to make value statements. The curriculum has the following to say about the assessing of writing in particular:

Assessment of written work will focus primarily on the learner's ability to convey meaning, as well as how correctly they have written, for example, correct language structures and use, spelling and punctuation. All assessment should recognise that language learning is a process and that learners will not produce a completely correct piece of work the first time round. Therefore the various stages in the writing process should also be assessed. (118)

This confirms the neglect of the aesthetic and the imaginative in writing. A student writes successfully because she has the 'ability to convey meaning' and write 'correctly'. There is no reference either direct or implied that writing is there for anything but a utilitarian conveyance of meaning. Writing *is* transaction.

There are two more factors to be considered. The first is term-based assessment. The curriculum determines that students have to complete a certain number of tasks each term, the relative values of which are determined by the Department. For example, in the first term of Grade 9, students have to complete two writing tasks, an oral task and one language test and all teachers have to record these marks accordingly on standard mark sheets distributed by the Department. The rationale for this term-by-term assessment is that it provides teachers with 'feedback' (118) to help them 'understand' and 'assist' the learner's 'growth' and 'development'. In other words, it directs the teacher towards those areas in which students need attention and guidance. In reality, what it does is to increase the load upon both students and teachers. At the Senior Phase level, when English is one of nine subjects for which students have to complete tasks, the quality of written work that they are able to submit is unlikely to be their best. For teachers, it makes it even harder for teachers to give individual, meaningful feedback to students while they write and after they have submitted their work. It also puts pressure on teachers to fill their mark sheets and means that a high proportion of the work students complete is for formal assessment. In

my experience, an anxiety that runs close to the surface for most students is whether or not what they are doing is 'for marks', the implication being that work that is not for formal assessment requires less effort and attention to detail. Marks become a determining factor and establish an environment in which such things as experimentation and invention in writing are potential liabilities. The moment that students write according to that for which they believe the marking teacher will reward them, something has been compromised and lost in the teaching of writing.

The second factor is the creative writing examination. I need not reiterate my earlier charge against this except to say that it confirms all that is wrong about the curriculum in terms of how it subjects education to an assessment imperative.

### **A curriculum reimaged**

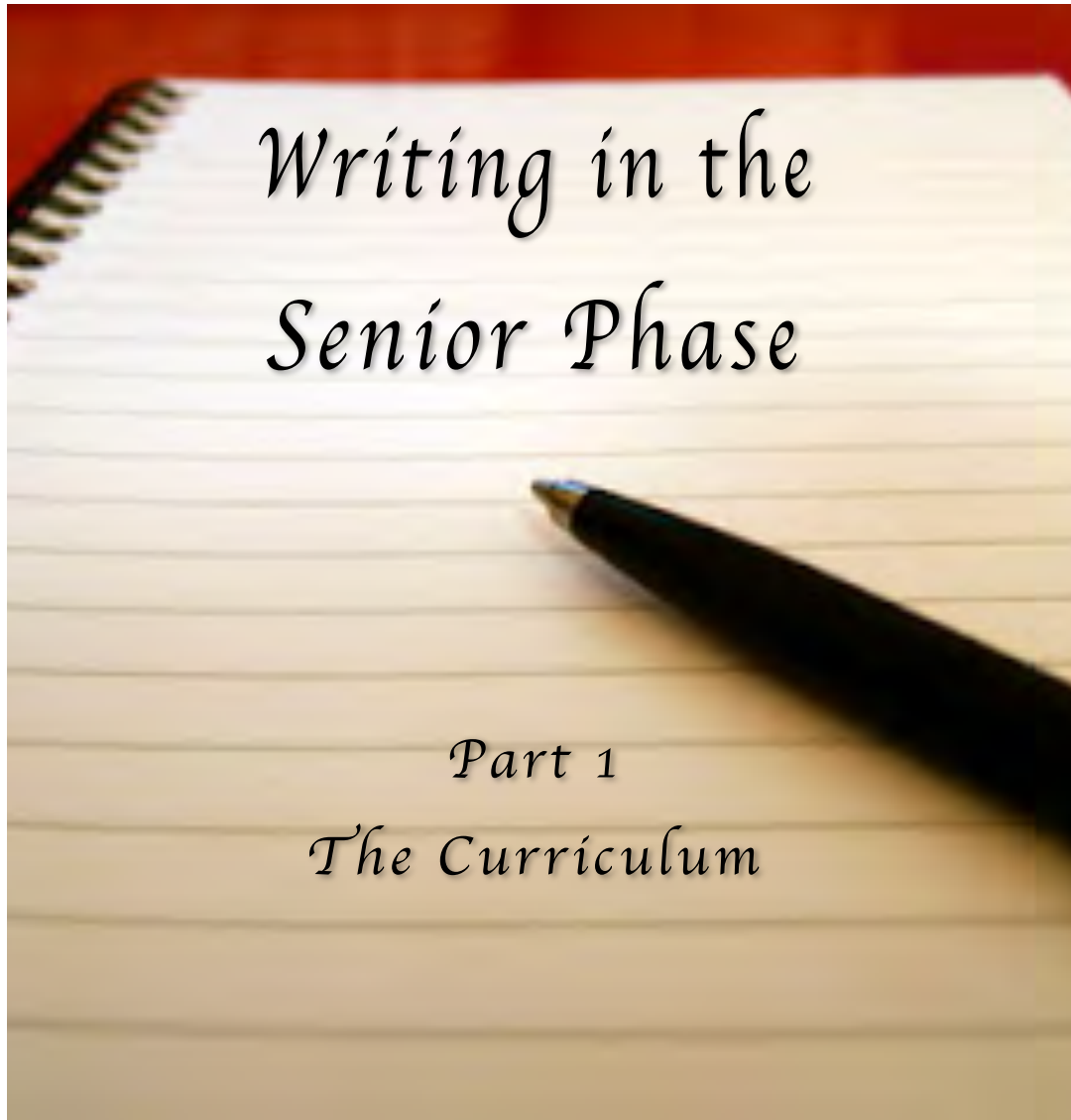
The last point to be made before presenting an alternative curriculum is the reiteration of an earlier point: the curriculum is subject to the social forces that determine education. It has already been pointed out that the structure of the current curriculum is a function of a teacher-student ratio that limits extended, meaningful interaction. Whatever I propose as an immediate alternative is going to be subject to this and other dynamics.

Nonetheless, an alternative is needed. Teachers cannot continue to perpetuate the writing pedagogy of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. And so it is that I present a writing curriculum reimaged for English Home Language in the Senior Phase.

# Reimagining the curriculum

*Chapter 7*

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# Introduction

It is widely taken for granted these days that writing is an essential skill for someone to possess in order to be considered 'literate'. In a world in which writing is so common and widespread – in everything from novels to instruction booklets, emails to advertising pamphlets, road signs to Facebook statuses – it is easy to conclude that everyone should write and hard to imagine that there was once a time when most people could not. And yet mass literacy in writing is a relatively recent phenomenon. For most of human history, writing has been an activity reserved for a few specialized individuals, and it is only in the last few centuries that writing has been taught to the population at large of most societies.

This prompts a question: Why is writing a feature of compulsory education now? One answer to this question is that writing has become so much part of how our societies function that it is necessary for people to write if they wish to participate in the multiple aspects of society that require it. Basic writing literacy is required for a wide range of jobs, and with the advent of the electronic age, it is increasingly commonplace for people to need to write *something* in order to access information or communicate via the internet.

A more adequate answer – and one which addresses the teaching of writing at home language level – would require going beyond basic literacy to consider the ways in which writing opens up possibilities for pleasure, reflection, relationship, learning, literature and organization. The ability to write is the expression of a fundamentally human capacity for thought and language that is developed in students in the belief that to do so is to enrich their imaginative and relational potential. Writing has to do with more than just functioning or getting by. To be sure, writing is incredibly useful in these areas, but there is so much more to writing than just being useful.

The principles discussed in this curriculum could be broadly applied to the teaching of writing at all levels. However, it needs to be specified that expectations of writing vary with age, that what students in the Senior Phase are capable of is generally less advanced than that of which students in the Further Education and Training Phase are capable. The relevance and application of this curriculum to the Senior Phase has much to do with the transitory role that this phase fulfils between the more essential literacies of the junior grades and the higher order thinking required in the Further Education and Training phase. The higher order thinking and abstraction that accompany learning in this phase are supported by writing, and students who are accustomed to writing and who can write well are able to engage more productively.

While this is of great importance, it is even more important that students in the Senior Phase are introduced to a culture of writing in which people write and improve as writers because they want to. In this culture, writing is not a matter of artificial incentives and penalties but a purposeful, pleasurable and meaningful activity that broadens the possibilities of those who practise it well. From the Senior Phase onwards into the rest of their social, academic, personal and political lives, young people will find that the ability to write opens up opportunities for thought, relationship and work that would otherwise remain closed to them. As will be discussed later, this has to do with more than just attaining levels of literacy necessary for economic participation.

As we come to teach writing, we need to remember that people write in an unlimited number of contexts and for an unlimited number of reasons. The contexts for which we see people writing today are likely to be very different from those for which people will be writing in fifty or even five years' time. Similarly, the ways in which writing has been taught have changed a good deal in the last hundred years. There has been a lot of trial and error, a large amount of research and a great many theoretical perspectives on how it should be done. It is helpful to be familiar with some of the main ideas that have emerged out of this, particularly those which have endured and been widely validated.

# A history

One place to start is in Britain, the home of the English language. With the industrial revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries came the rise of compulsory education and a belief that writing should be taught to the general population in order to prepare them for the working world. Writing was seen as something utilitarian and the emphasis in teaching it was on grammatical correctness. By the end of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the subject of English had so developed in the public school that a new way of thinking about writing was starting to take root. By the end of the 1960s, there was a growing movement of teachers and academics who urged that writing should be seen as something with personal creative potential, that students should be allowed to write about things that mattered to them. By the 1970s, it was accepted for students in English class to be writing in ways that were imaginative and reflective, although most writing in schools was about students expressing to teachers what they knew in their various content areas.

In the 1970s in both Britain and America there was an interest in the cognitive processes that directed writing, in what students were thinking as they wrote. This interest had to do with the development of the child and the recognition that the school was only one context in which learning took place for young people. They came to school already knowing language and their growth in language happened as a result of social interaction and not because they were learning about it at school. In America at this time, there was criticism of how writing had generally been taught in schools, namely as the replication of certain forms or types of writing. This way of teaching was identified by its critics as the 'current-rhetorical' approach and it was seen as having limited benefit for students in that it taught them *what* to write instead of *how* they should think through their writing. This was also known as a 'product'-centred approach to writing, while the 'new' movement in teaching writing came to be known as a 'process'-oriented approach.

The process approach to writing took on many forms and was supported by a large body of research through the 1980s and 1990s. The essential idea was that students should be encouraged and allowed to go through a number of steps on their way to presenting their final neat copy. There was a lot of debate over exactly what these steps were or in what order they should occur, and process theory came in for criticism by those who said it was trying to make a one-size-fits-all procedure for teachers and student writers. There is still debate over exactly what the best methods are for teaching writing, and is likely that there will never be complete agreement. Nonetheless, there were points of agreement that emerged from the debate about how best to approach the teaching of writing. It was agreed that student writers require individual attention as they write and not just a theory of writing to tell them how to write. The importance of audience and context was also a point of consensus; students should not be taught to replicate templates of writing but to identify for whom they were writing and why. What these point to is that teachers need to help their students develop into writers who can think independently and imaginatively in whatever contexts they find themselves. The classroom is one context and so students should not be limited to writing in ways that work only for their teachers and the classroom.

One expression of how this history of teaching writing has culminated in contemporary times is the National Writing Project (NWP) in the United States. It is a non-profit, university-based organization that began as the Bay Writing Project in San Francisco in 1974 and has grown to 200 sites across all 50 states. The theoretical base for the NWP is a version of process-oriented writing, its means of reform is the professional development of teachers and its stated mission is to focus 'the knowledge, expertise, and leadership of...[the] nation's educators on sustained efforts to improve writing and learning for all learners' (nwp.org). The NWP has recognised the centrality of writing to learning and promotes writing in all subjects across the curriculum. In one of its publications, *Because Writing Matters*, the author, journalist Carl Nagin, writes:

Because writing can support a high level of learning in all core subjects, it matters in any classroom where inquiry, knowledge and expression are valued and recognized by students and teachers. (117)

The same publication quotes the National Commission on Writing (NCW), another non-profit initiative, which published a report on the state of writing in America's schools in the 2003 entitled 'The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution':

If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with details, wrestle with facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write. (Magrath et al., 2003:9)

The sentiments expressed here are indicative of a movement in education that can be identified as 'writing across the curriculum' or 'writing to learn'. It is founded on the belief that writing strongly supports learning and that students should write frequently in all subject areas. Writing provides a forum in which students can both express and reflect on ideas and do so as part of their learning, separate from formal assessment.

This approach is not limited to the subject of English. It can trace its origins in large part back to research carried out in the 1960s and 1970s into the role of language in learning. The scope of this work was education as a whole not just English as a subject within it. In contemporary terms, the NWP is a resource to all teachers, not just English teachers. However, the importance of writing across the curriculum underscores the importance of writing in English as a language subject. The fact that 'writing matters' across the educational spectrum means that it must be a central focus of English as a language subject. The implication is that if English teachers can engage with their students in such ways as to develop quality writing then students are educationally advantaged across the board.

That said, the importance of teaching writing in the subject of English is not measured solely by its broader educational value. The ability to write and to write well is of personal and social benefit. It is a use of language that presents

opportunities for imagination and relationship that would not otherwise exist as they do for those who engage in it. It is the purview of English as a home language subject to explore these uses of language through writing.

## Writing at the centre

An historical account of the place of writing in the subject of English and education as a whole shows the movement of writing from the periphery to the centre, from being a matter of functional literacy to being an activity with its own intrinsic value and purpose. Writing is not incidental to the subject of English: it is a central, defining activity. A standing expectation in the English classroom is that students write much and often. They are given every chance and the support needed to develop in their use of language through writing. A crucial implication of this is that writing becomes the activity around which the other activities of English – most notably language and literary studies and oral activities – are arranged.

There has been a substantial debate about the best ways to teach language (or grammar). On the one hand, grammar has been presented as something to be learned as a set of rules and then consolidated through repetitive exercise. The opposing view is that grammar should be learned only as it arises in specific contexts of writing and reading. What is clear is that grammar should not be learned for its own sake. This is a specialized field of study at tertiary level, either linguistics or philology, and one that very few adults pursue. The memorization and recollection of grammar rules as a specific content does not make sense as a school-level activity. The primary justification for the teaching of grammar should be that it improves and enhances writing. Writing is the starting point, not grammar, and students should only receive instruction in grammar that is salient and explicable to them as writers and in a manner that refers back continually to their writing.

Literature has traditionally been included in the English curriculum on the assumption that 'great' or 'worthy' literature can inculcate moral and cultural values in those who read and study it. Its aesthetic excellence further recommends it for consideration. A key activity in studying literature at school is 'analysis'. Students are taught to give close attention to the features of good literature and to write in a predominantly expository manner on what they observe and conclude. Writing – and a specific form of it – is employed in the service of this analysis and a student's apprehension of the given text assessed on how accurately he has expressed his understanding of it. If writing is taken to be the central activity of the subject of English, then the purpose of studying literature changes. Literature is no longer a content with which students need to be familiar but a community of writing with which they engage, one from which they have much to learn but one to which they also have a contribution to make. Outside of school, there are no 'rules' for how people read and respond to literature. Literature has always filled a number of roles in society, for example, entertainment, subversion and persuasion. Literature, by definition, is an imaginative activity and seeks to engage people imaginatively. Therefore, students need to be given the freedom to interact with literature accordingly. The kind of writing tasks that this occasions will be discussed in the next section.

The subject of English provides students with opportunities to develop their language use orally as well as in writing. There are certain activities that are exclusively oral in nature and which do not take their lead from writing. Class discussion at its various levels and in its various forms does not need to be scripted, and in fact a good deal of it has benefit because of its immediate and social nature. Students should talk because it is a means of engagement, just as writing is means of engagement. However, writing has potential for a level of reflection not available to spoken language, and it is this capacity for reflection that the teaching of writing seeks to develop. In planned, formal oral activities, the refinement of thought and expression promoted by writing is crucial.

The centrality of writing to English bears on the kinds of activities and relationships that occur in the classroom. On this point, Arthur Applebee of the State University of New York, writes the following:

Much of the emphasis in improving writing instruction over the past several decades has focused on providing *authentic tasks* that would be read by *responsive audiences*, including the *teacher interacting* with students about the *growth of the ideas and understanding* they have expressed in writing. (2013:15, italics added)

This is an appropriate summary of how the teaching of writing has progressed and to which point. The points made here – authentic tasks, responsive audiences, interacting teachers, growing ideas and understanding – are worth elaborating on to provide a further foundation of ideas or theories from which to work. This will be followed by a proposal as to how these ideas might be worked out practically.

## Authentic tasks

Authentic tasks are not tasks that are guaranteed to produce quality writing – there are too many variables for both student and teacher to ensure this – but they are tasks designed on an understanding of what it would mean to write authentically. An authentic task (the term ‘writing activity’ is preferred), in the hands of an insightful and imaginative teacher, is one that is conducive to students writing purposefully and meaningfully, and which requires students to think carefully and intelligently about why they are writing, what they hope to achieve by writing and what influences are at work in their writing. This, then, is what it means to write authentically. This is not about teaching students to write according to forms of writing that exist outside of school, but about familiarizing them with ways in which mature writers think about themselves, their readers and their contexts. The authenticity of a writing activity is not in its replication of types of writing but in its recognition of the imagination and invention that are required to write material that others find convincing and compelling, whatever the material that is produced. A

task is authentic because it helps the student writer develop towards the kinds of *actual* considerations that guide mature writers.

Writing has often been presented in schools as being divided between 'transactional' and 'creative' forms of writing. The former refers to written pieces that fulfil given functions (for example, letters, agendas and diary entries) and the latter refers to written pieces that exist as exercises in creativity and imagination (for example, narrative, descriptive and argumentative essays). This is an artificial divide and an obstacle to writing authentically. It is not sustainable given that there are countless forms of 'creative' (non-transactional) writing that are aimed at achieving quite specific responses in society (for example, protest poetry, *Animal Farm*) and an abundance of transactional texts that exhibit a high level of creativity (for example, letters to the press, brochures). This dichotomy has been promoted on the assumption that schools need to teach students how to write in order to fulfil certain key functions when they leave school and that the best way to do that is to pre-empt what those functions are and to teach towards them. The implication of this is that students are taught *what* to write but not *why* they write it. As a result, they are not encouraged to think through *how* they might go about writing something that deviates from the anticipated format. Again, authenticity is not a question of sticking to 'real-life' forms but of anticipating and discerning contexts and adapting accordingly. The same imaginative faculties are required for transactional writing as for non-transactional writing.

An even more significant problem with dividing writing into 'transactional' and 'creative' is that it implies that there are forms of writing that are not creative or imaginative, whereas imagination is required for all writing. Imagination is the ability to perceive something that is not present as being present, the ability to entertain mentally events, ideas and people in a way that makes them real to the person imagining. Imagination is the precondition for being able to think and live in any way beyond what is immediate. Writing is fundamentally an act of imagination in that it requires the writer to anticipate audiences that are not seen and responses that have not yet come to pass. A writer has to imagine how the words and sentences

that she commits to be read will be received and how effective they might be in representing her intention. Imagination in writing includes those processes of logic and deduction required for certain audiences and contexts but it also necessarily refers to such qualities as intuition and discernment, qualities that are, by definition, not reducible to logic and deduction. Accurately anticipating how an audience will react to a piece of writing may involve rational thought, but the very act of rationally thinking through the various options is an act of imagination. So too is considering the stylistic choices that need to be made in order to achieve certain effects.

Imagination is perhaps the most important quality in writers. Writers always have to imagine audiences and responses, even those that seem strongly implied or indicated by context. What is more, writers always have to apply imagination to contexts, even those that seem obvious. Writing activities that push students actively to imagine both context and audience promote the development of the kind of authentic imagination exercised by mature writers. The point is not to write narrative or descriptive texts – and to insist on adherence to these generic forms – but to encourage the kind of imagination and invention that make writing in these sorts of ways possible. Students need to be given the best opportunity to explore the imaginative potential of writing, particularly if it means writing across forms and genres. It is a crucial part of writing development.

In addition to exercising and developing their imagination, student writers also need to develop their aesthetic sensibility. A further implication of the division of writing into transactional and non-transactional is that transactional writing is prioritised on the basis of it being perceived to have greater *use* in both school and adult life. Crudely put, transactional writing is important because it gets things done. This marginalization of the aesthetic is as illegitimate as the separation of imagination from writing. An aesthetic sensibility is the ability to take pleasure in writing as an act of creation. It is a sensitivity to the intrinsic artistry in language, a capacity for gratification in simply writing something. There is something inherently imaginative and creative – and subsequently satisfying – in writing even the most formal texts.

For example, legal documents in all their dryness require an extraordinarily high level of creativity in choosing language that balances ambiguity and definitiveness.

Writing aesthetically is to write because there is the potential for pleasure in both the act of writing and its reception; writing is worth doing simply because it provides the writer and the reader with enjoyment. The written piece has value in and of itself as an object of contemplation and not because it achieves something of utility. This has always been and continues to be one of the most powerful motivations for people to write. It seems obvious to say that the pleasure of writing produces writing and yet it is easy to forget in a school context, particularly when much of the work done there is motivated by assessment. Pleasure in writing must be part of a writer's development and designing activities that encourage and help students to write purely for pleasure should be included as 'authentic' activities. The role of the teacher is not simply to teach student writers how to write; it is also to take up the difficult but vital challenge of nurturing in them a desire to write for its own sake. While this more than likely has benefits for how well they write, it is enough that they might find a pleasure and meaning in the act outside of school that they would otherwise not have discovered.

## **Responsive audiences**

As was discussed above, the act of writing requires imagination of audience and context. This does not make actual audiences for writing redundant. On the contrary, when student writers receive responses from the audiences that they have anticipated, these responses provide valuable feedback on how insightful and accurate this anticipation was. If a student is surprised by the response of an actual audience, then she is provided with an opportunity to reflect on why what she imagined was different. The lukewarm reception to a student writer's story from a collective of real readers is a compelling reason for her to consider what she might do to provoke a different response or certainly what she might do differently the

next time around. A student who writes a letter of application for an actual job opportunity and receives a reply from the party to whom he has written is given a sense of what it means to have to engage formally in writing with people he does not know and yet wants to impress.

The teacher's professional role includes being able to imagine and assimilate the audiences for the writing that she prompts from her students, not only in the assessment of the writing but also as they interact with students as they write. Teachers have to approach their reading of student writing with a keen awareness of their own biases and stylistic preferences and need to develop in themselves the ability to motivate for their responses.

The importance of responsive audiences is that student writers begin to discern for themselves the quality of their writing. They learn to be critical readers of their own work. Mature writers don't always 'get it right' in terms of achieving the responses they hope for, but that they do so with any consistency is by receiving and being able to reflect on feedback to their writing. It should be the aim of writing education that students leave school with the ability to process both validation and criticism of their written work in order to confidently and competently evaluate it for themselves.

This raises the issue of numerical evaluation. The nature of most (if not all) education systems is to assign numerical values as indicators of progress and achievement. The method of determining values for written work has typically been through the application of standard marking grids, often called 'rubrics'. The inherent danger in these is that they tend to homogenise the audience of a given piece of writing artificially, which is in opposition to providing a responsive audience. The need for such marking instruments is to assign objective numerical value to writing and as they do not supply genuine responses against which students can measure their imagined responses, this numerical imperative does not enable students to develop the ability to discern value for themselves. Furthermore, marking grids cannot give an account of the intangible aesthetic qualities of writing

and if anything tend to reduce subjective aesthetic (often stylistic) judgements to misleading objective descriptors and increments.

The fundamental reason for evaluating student writing is to help students develop as writers. Student writers cannot spontaneously determine the worth of their writing and so cannot develop without insightful and mature feedback. Standardised marking grids cannot substitute for this kind of interaction, nor can the marks that they produce be the reason for which evaluation takes place. The generation of 'objective' numerical values is secondary to the development in student writers of their ability to discern and describe the value in their own writing. What is more, the generation of marks is not sufficient rationale for making students produce writing under time constraints for decontextualized tasks. This does not give them opportunity to reflect on their written work and to select what they believe to be the best reflection of their writing ability. Writing examinations do not give students chance to develop and do not showcase their writing abilities. Students should be allowed to properly think through their writing, write according to authentic writing activities for responsive audiences and select what they believe to be their best work. This promotes ownership of their written work and is a far truer reflection of how mature writers actually work. Part II of this curriculum discusses some ways in which student writing might legitimately be evaluated.

## Interacting teachers

Teacher professionalism has been identified in many educational quarters as the primary means of educational reform. In other words, a country's investment in its teachers is seen as the surest way to invest in the education of its children.

Whatever curricula are written or acts are passed it is the wisdom, training, discernment and insight of the teacher in the classroom that matter most. This is amply illustrated when it comes to English teachers and the teaching of writing. It has never been enough to tell students what to write and how, and then to assume

that this will produce the desired result. Student writers need more than theory; they need interaction with others who can provide feedback and insight. The responsive audience is not just an endpoint but, as much as possible, a continual reality as student writers compose. English teachers are language professionals, and part of their profession is being able not only to imagine themselves as audiences of their students' writing but to engage meaningfully with their students *as they write* and not just at the end of the writing process. They need to be able to motivate for whatever responses they offer to their students' work.

In this regard, it is helpful for teachers to think of themselves as writers themselves and to look for opportunities to write and be published, in blogs, journals, newspapers, anthologies or other forums. At the very least, teachers should write with their students. This moves teachers away from content-based delivery and towards interaction in the actual endeavour of writing that they have occasioned in their students. Teachers are part of the writing culture that they seek to establish in their classrooms; they are not outside of it. Writing teachers help to create an environment conducive to writing by signalling more clearly than lecturing about it could that the teacher believes in the pleasure and value of writing. If English classrooms are to be oriented around writing then it is crucial that students see their teachers writing and that teachers find purpose in it for themselves.

## growing ideas and understanding

The 'writing to learn' approach takes for granted that writing offers students a chance to actively engage with what they are learning. It is worth repeating the National Commission of Writing:

If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with details, wrestle with facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write. (Magrath, 2003:9)

It is these acts of struggling, wrestling and reworking in order to properly know something that frame the benefit of writing to education across the board. Writing is a scripted representation of what students are thinking and so offers them, their peers and their teachers the opportunity to reflect on and engage with this thought in all of its incompleteness and progression.

The relevance for the subject of English of this cross-curricular concern is that students need to be given plenty of opportunity to grow in their writing. The development of writing abilities presupposes that students do a lot of writing that is not presented as a 'finished' product as well as writing that is completed for final presentation. Students need the freedom to learn how to write by writing, to be free to make plenty of mistakes without fear of penalty. More than one study has shown that there are reasons behind the mistakes that students make in their writing and that teachers need to engage with students about why they have made these mistakes rather than penalize them. As Mike Rose of UCLA says, 'Error marks the place where education begins' (1989:189). Students develop as writers in different ways, at different paces and to different degrees and it is the role of the teacher to respond appropriately to each student as he develops. Writing is an activity determined by the writer, occasion, audience and intention, and although there are no universally successful methodologies and techniques, there are some that work substantially better than others. However, so much depends on the individual teacher's insight and discernment if any approach is to work for a given student writing for a particular context.



*Writing in the  
Senior Phase*

*Part 2  
The Classroom*

## Teachers

The first practical consideration of implementing this new curriculum is the teacher. However compelling this or any other curriculum might be in theory, it has to be entrusted to the understanding and ability of teachers in their classrooms. Teachers with insight, initiative and courage can salvage something from bad curricula; teachers with little inclination and vision can render even excellent material ineffective. This is not to say there is no generalizable content to teach but rather that learning is about far more than absorbing content. It is about relationship and process, an often idiosyncratic arrangement in which students need to interact with peers, teachers, parents and others as they individually discover what it means to learn. This is particularly true for the teaching of writing, which is not reducible to a transmission of content but which requires a high degree of interaction and feedback in order to make whatever generalizable content there is real to students as they write. The professional role of teachers is central to this.

The NWP serves as an example of how such a professional culture can be established and maintained. It is a university-based organization that receives government funding and which operates on the basis of teachers sharing ideas around effective practice in formal and informal contexts<sup>23</sup>. Crucially, there is a conviction around the importance of professional development that informs the NWP's practice: one of the six chapters of *Because Writing Matters* is given entirely to professional development. The book quotes a 1995 report into research conducted by the National Centre for the Study of Writing and Literacy in which its authors state:

As school reform efforts are demonstrating, we must depend on reflective teachers as essential contributors to any national effort aimed at improving

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<sup>23</sup> The NWP applies the 'writing to learn' approach to the degree that all teachers are regarded as teachers of writing. The mandate of this curriculum does not extend to teachers of other subjects, although it will make a claim further on for writing work done in other subjects.

student achievement. Further, if schools are to become professional workplaces, writing will have to become integral to teachers' work and to their identities as professionals. (Freedman et al., 1995:8)

The curriculum presented here is a part and not the sum of teaching writing. The convictions and assumptions underlying its theory are by no means exhaustive. The greater part of writing development in students is up to teachers as they interact with students. What follows are considerations as to how these interactions might be most fruitful.

## Writing activities

The necessity of setting authentic writing activities was discussed in the theoretical component of the curriculum. What this means is that the time that students spend writing in English needs to be thought through very carefully by teachers so that students see meaning and purpose in what they are writing. This can be facilitated in a number of different ways.

### Regular writing

Regular writing slots in English lessons provide both teachers and students with opportunity to establish expectations around what writing in the classroom looks like and gives teachers ample opportunity to find out what works and what does not. This can allow for the reflective qualities of writing to be explored in that students are regularly given time to write about whatever immediately concerns them. The writing can be very open-ended and a matter primarily of thinking through whatever personal issues are relevant to the students, be they mundane or profound. This sort of writing does not require a readership beyond the writer, although the one condition is that students write as continuously as possible. The emphasis is entirely on expression and giving students the chance to write simply because they can. This

hopefully communicates to students that writing can be a purely personal pursuit and one that can give them freedom to explore their own minds and emotions.

### **Writing for discussion**

Talk forms an important part of learning for adolescents, and one of the key abilities of the English teacher is knowing how to facilitate discussion in the classroom that allows students to explore ideas while still maintaining a direction and structure. The aim of group and class discussion is for students to express ideas in their own words in the hearing of their peers so that whatever is being discussed might become more a function of their own language than that of the teacher or the text. The challenges of minority participation and off-topic discussion are for another curriculum, but where writing can help is in having students think through and articulate their ideas both in anticipation of discussion and in retrospect. This gives the teacher regular chance to read through and engage with what students are going to contribute. They can do this by setting aside short periods of writing in lessons and then wondering around the students and reading then what they have written. They could also do this at the end of class so that they have chance to read the writing before the next lesson and to draw points from it. Alternatively, they could direct students to write in preparation for class. This can potentially benefit students who are nervous about addressing groups of people in that it saves them at least the difficulty of having to think on the spot. Both are examples of day-to-day engagements with writing. The benefit of this approach is that it is conducive to creating a writing culture in which it is expected that students write and teachers read what they have written.

### **Theme-inspired writing**

Another approach is theme-based and is planned over the course of a number of weeks, perhaps as few as one or as many as a term. What this does is establish a theme from which the activities of the English classroom take their lead. A literary text or selection of poetry could provide the theme, or it could be a project that seeks to simulate features of society beyond the classroom, for example,

propaganda, advertising, news media or event planning. Whatever it is, it provides teachers with an extended opportunity to create an environment in which roles for writer and audience can be discussed at length.

A theme-based approach is not new. It has been used before in a wide range of contexts with different levels of success. Its importance to this writing-based curriculum is that the deliberate immersion of students in a defined context provides them with some assistance in imagining the roles of both writer and reader as they write. It gives students the opportunity to become familiar with particular discourses and to give a greater share of their focus to the considerations of writers interacting with and sharing these discourses.

This also provides opportunity for English teachers to partner with other subject departments and to build their efforts to establish context on what is being taught in these other subjects. For example, if students are learning about the French Revolution in Social Sciences, the theme in English class could be on revolutions around the world and the speeches that have inspired them. This could provide many opportunities for students to read and discuss such texts and to write into their own imagined contexts for revolution from the perspectives of both the rebels and the status quo. The English teacher is given opportunity and means to establish context. Furthermore, this kind of collaboration has potential to reduce the workload on students outside of class, particularly in terms of activities for evaluation. One activity could potentially serve two subjects. All of this said, the focus for the English teacher is the writing. Whatever else is added by collaboration with other subjects serves to augment the students' experience of meaningful writing.

### **Writing and learning about language**

It is in connection to such imagined contexts that the relationships between writing and language and literature might be explored. It was noted earlier that there is an continuing debate about how language should be taught but that it should be

recognised that grammar is not a content in and of itself. The teaching of grammar is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The point of teaching grammar is to benefit the student writer and speaker. This is not to say that aspects of language should not be taught. For example, a teacher might take time to explain parts of speech and take his students through some examples. However, the real learning takes place when students start having to think about parts of speech in their own writing. Once more this would require a high level of interaction between teacher and student. It might look something like the following.

The theme for two weeks has been 'Houses around the world', a collaboration with the Technology department. In Technology, students have been required to build scale models for houses of their own design based on environment and function. Having spoken about parts of speech, the teacher, Ms Samuels, then proceeds to show both interior and exterior pictures of a house. The students are given details such as location and price and instructed to write as if they were estate agents trying to sell the house in question. As the students write, Ms Samuels takes time to read what 14-year-old Lyle has written.

Ms Samuels: Lyle, let's talk about this sentence here: 'The roof is red and broken.' Remember we were talking about adjectives? What are the adjectives you've used in this sentence?

Lyle: 'Red' and 'broken'.

Ms Samuels: Why have you included them in this sentence?

Lyle: To describe the roof.

Ms Samuels: What are you trying to say about the roof?

Lyle: (laughing) That it's red and broken, ma'am.

Ms Samuels: (smiling) True. Let me rather ask, *why* are you writing about the roof?

Lyle: To tell people what it looks like.

Ms Samuels: Which people?

Lyle: People who might want to buy the house.

- Ms Samuels: What do you want these people to think about the house?
- Lyle: Ma'am?
- Ms Samuels: How do you need to describe the house so that these people would want to buy it?
- Lyle: It needs to sound good.
- Ms Samuels: Right! What about 'red' and 'broken' make the house sound good.
- Lyle: Oh. Well, maybe 'broken' doesn't work so well.
- Ms Samuels: What might work better?
- Lyle: The roof's broken, ma'am! You can't make that sound good!
- Ms Samuels: Is there not something else you can say about the roof without pointing out that it's broken? Have another look at the picture. I'll come back to you in a moment. Write down some other adjectives that you could use to describe the roof that might be more positive.

Obviously, this is a constructed interaction, but it serves to illustrate the kinds of interactions that can take place around students' writing in which grammar is more than principles to be learned but rather considerations of style as well as correctness. If Lyle were then to go on and write down even three more adjectives correctly, it would demonstrate to Ms Samuels that he is at least on track as far as understanding how this particular part of speech works. In the process of trying to find other adjectives, he would hopefully be gaining insight into how adjectives work rather than just what they are.

The interaction above assumes a traditional role for the teacher, one that is constrained by physical availability. A more sustainable and effective configuration would be one in which students learn to provide each other with accurate and articulate feedback on their writing. This adds another dimension to learning, namely learning by teaching. The teacher's role is still that of resident expert, but it is not expertise of the sort that needs to be absorbed by students as content. It is expertise in facilitating meaningful interaction between students around writing.

## Writing in literature

The kinds of authentic writing prompted by literature need to be based on an understanding of literature as *writing* not *content*. Literature as content narrows interpretation and prompts writing from the student that is almost exclusively expository in nature. Literature as writing recognises that the sorts of considerations guiding writers of literature may be more refined but are the same in nature to those towards which student writers are maturing. Furthermore, there is recognition of the fact that literature exists outside of schools as something open-ended, dynamic and very often provocative of further writing. School activities set in response to literature need to draw students into the sort of thinking that is associated with writing literature and responding to it outside of school. For example, strict designations between narrative, descriptive and reflective writing are not helpful given that many works of literature incorporate all three elements simultaneously. This isn't to say that students need not read and understand literary texts, nor that literature is reduced to example. If anything, it requires them to read more closely and to engage more thoroughly with literature. Once more, some examples help to illustrate the point.

An officious bureaucrat has received Adam Small's poem 'There's somethin'' and feels compelled to respond. He writes a very official-looking and officious-sounding letter in which he addresses not only the points that Small raises but also his rather free use of grammar.

The press have arrived in the market square just as the Prince has finished his speech over the dead bodies of Mercutio and Tybalt. They are clamouring for details over the deaths and Romeo's banishment. One reporter, having compiled what facts she can, sits down to write as accurate and objective an account as she can.

Following the opening scenes of *The Play of the Diary of Anne Frank* in which the Frank and Van Daan families have just arrived in the annex, students are

given chance to reflect on the dynamics of the confined space. They have to think through what resources are available and what conflicts might take place. They reflect on what freedoms they have in comparison to Anne and write a piece in which they consider what they might do if placed in her kind of situation.

Dylan Thomas has just read 'Do not go gentle into that good night' to his dying father alone in a candle-lit room. The narrative ends elliptically with Thomas bowing his head and then hearing a movement from the bed. The story continues.

The virtue of these exercises is not in their guaranteed efficacy but in the fact that they were relatively easy to imagine given the freedom to have literature occasion a variety of responses.

## Collaboration

A writing-centred curriculum necessitates an abundance of at least two resources: student writing and feedback to that writing. Prolific writing helps to establish a culture of writing but eventually it requires a responsive audience if it is to lead to improved writing. The reality is that one teacher teaching a class of even twenty-five students cannot give each student the feedback that is required, both in the process and after the publication of writing. This does not mean that teachers are powerless, just that they have to think differently about where they direct their efforts. And it is doubtful that they can do so effectively without considering possibilities for collaboration at every level.

It has already been suggested that English teachers collaborate with other departments. It has also been implied that English teachers draw in parties outside of school in order to provide their students with appropriate audiences for various

pieces of written work. Were students to participate in an advertising project, for example, it is not inconceivable that advertising professionals could be prevailed upon to read through a class of campaign proposals and then to give general feedback on what worked and what didn't with reference to some specific positive examples.

Another form of collaboration is to encourage students to work together in their written work, both in producing and in evaluating it. If the aim is truly to develop student writers towards a maturity with which they can evaluate their own and others' work, then this is a necessary extension of this. If students can become used to reading and giving feedback to each other's work, then it helps to further establish a culture of writing in which it is also commonplace to have to explain what works and what does not in writing that is not one's own. Another permutation of this is for teachers to select a group of learners each week for specialized attention in anticipation of the following week's writing requirements. This group could be primed for what is to come and given guidance as to how they might evaluate the writing that is produced in that week.

## Evaluation

Student writing needs to be evaluated. Student writers need to feel the demands of context and audience exerted on them as they write. They require insightful and individual commentary on their work to help them perceive and respond to these demands. Fair and varied evaluation gives them a sense of their success in this perception and response, both as they are writing and after they have published. Student writers have the best chance of developing their ability to discern the quality of their own writing when they receive responses from a variety of sources or means.

## Means of evaluation

### *Negotiation*

There is great benefit in students being able to determine beforehand how their writing is going to be evaluated. Thorough consideration of what would constitute 'success' in a given activity is for student writers part of learning to determine value in their own writing. The accurate exercise of this kind of anticipation is common to mature writers. In the classroom, this can take the form of discussion at a group or class level. The key is that students actively negotiate how their work will be measured and impose on themselves as writers the conditions for success. The means of evaluation are not externally imposed but are decided on by the community of writers in the classroom. The teacher may contribute but only when absolutely necessary. The internal agreement on value naturally facilitates peer evaluation and allows for a good volume of meaningful writing and response to take place independently of the constraints of teacher availability.

### *Peer review*

Peer review proceeds well on the basis of negotiated descriptors and increments. Student writers need to learn to listen, assert, yield and defend in appropriate measure and they need to learn language for expressing this. The teacher can provide much of what is needed here but whatever the teacher conveys has to make sense in the minds and mouths of students if it is to be of lasting benefit to them as writers. Terms of evaluation provide a basis for students to think through and talk about what they are observing. Negotiated terms are an expression of the same kind of thought and discussion. It is the conversation around writing as much as whatever concrete value is attached to particular writing that matters, the dialogue between developing writers in community that is as important as what it finally produces.

In peer review, students need not evaluate every feature of the particular writing before them. In fact, part of learning to evaluate writing is learning to identify which features of a piece are foundational and which are more incidental. Furthermore, promoting focus on one particular stylistic feature for a given writing task to the exclusion of other features can allow students to spend more time in close observation of that one feature of style. This can become artificial and decontextualized if teachers are not themselves observant.

### ***Non-simulated Response***

Student writers need to have their work exposed to audiences with no vested interest in them as writers. Teachers need to exercise some measure of choice in this as it would not do to have the confidence of young writers (especially in the Senior Phase) undermined by unduly harsh criticism, but it is vital that student writers start to write for audiences beyond the classroom. This is part of them engaging with the kinds of wider writing communities that they will inevitably need to join. While they may not all become travel agents, the actual replies they receive in response to their written requests for travel advice exposes them to what it means to write for information. Few students will go on to be published writers, but the imaginative exertion of trying to entertain and provoke readers they imagine as spectators to their work is worthwhile for them as writers generally. One way to do this is to anthologize a class's writing for presentation to another class. Anonymity is preserved but a survey is taken of the most popular works and the reasons given for them being so.

### ***Professional discernment***

To assert that writing cannot be evaluated by external criteria is incorrect. External criteria can and must be brought to bear on student writing, but with certain conditions. Firstly, the development of student writers is closely allied to their initiation into a writing community or culture. Mature writers and the considerations guiding their writing frame the community with which teachers seek to familiarize

their students. It is these considerations that stand as the criteria by which student writers are evaluated. Secondly, these criteria are not standards up to which students must write but rather the terms of a language *about* writing that is shared by teachers and students and which facilitates meaningful discussion between them. The use of criteria is not a substitute for discussion. Finally, the application of external criteria is not the elimination of subjectivity nor is it the establishment of a standardized response. In fact, recognition of those considerations entertained by mature writers is a means of understanding the subjective choices that determine their writing. Applied to student writing, this recognition helps students understand what stylistic choices are available to them as they seek to write more authentically and powerfully.

The kinds of stylistic choices available to them include considerations at different points of creation and construction in language. Questions of **vocabular range**, **denotation** and **connotation** are associated with word choice. At the point of sentence construction, such features as **parts of speech**, **phrases**, **clauses** and **voice** are more relevant, while in terms of structure, such considerations as **sentence or line length**, **paragraphing** or **stanza-fication** and **metaphor** enter the equation. Such considerations graduate student writers beyond matters of incorrect spelling and functional syntax.

## Considerations

The considerations of mature writers provide the basis for the criteria of evaluating student writing. This is not to read student writing as if it were the work of mature writers, but to perceive through their writing the degree to which students are aware of these considerations. A student's overall degree of *awareness* across these considerations and the *accomplishment* of writing appropriate to this – as discerned by the teacher – is the basis for a numerical representation of their work. The four considerations listed here do not operate independently. They overlap and inter-fer as a matter of course.

## **Context**

Does the context provide *defined* or *loose* roles for writer and reader? Defined roles are typically those determined by a person's occupation or official position, for example, the newspaper reporter invoked in the earlier section on 'Writing in literature'. A reporter providing a front-page story is tightly constrained by her context that demands a high yield of information from as objective a standpoint as possible. The reader is in a loose role in that he is free to react to the news as he wishes. The teenage reader of a list of chores is generally limited to a narrow range of options, while the parent writing them up can be as clinical or playful as she likes. Student writers must learn both to abide by and to subvert these roles. Whatever they do, it must not be because they don't know any better.

## **Audience**

The continuum here is from *internal* to *external*. An internal audience is familiar and can be fairly easily assumed. An external audience is far more differentiated and in certain instances very difficult to predict. Writing for an internal audience takes a great deal for granted and is not obligated to explain position, intention and motivation. Journal writing or writing to close friends is typical of this kind of writing, whereas writing for an external audience is more typified by writing for strangers. Writing for an internal audience carries an expectation of agreement and congruence; writing for an external audience has greater potential for disagreement and conflict.

## **Purpose**

Writers write for material purposes; they want to see concrete action resulting from what they have written. Writers write for aesthetic purposes; they want to arouse feelings in themselves and their readers, whether from the ideas they express, the language they use to express them or both. Writers also write for intellectual

purposes; they want to impart knowledge and prompt discussion and debate. Writers can write for all three purposes at once. They are not mutually exclusive.

## **Style**

Style is a question of meaning. It refers to the ways in which writers originate, manipulate and arrange their language to create meaning. It includes what is often designated as 'Language' on marking grids, the measure of how 'correctly' student writers have written. However, style encompasses every choice of language made whether conscious or unconscious.

If the act of writing is about creating or appropriating meaning, then it is the conventions of language, established at a moment in time through concerted and widespread use, that most constantly direct that meaning. Writers deviate from these conventions either consciously or unconsciously. Conscious deviation from convention is invention, an intentional movement away from what is established which, with enough widespread repetition, can become convention of its own. Shakespeare's contribution of over two thousand words and phrases to the English language is an example of this. (Invention needn't lead to convention. Indeed, much of it doesn't.)

Unconscious deviation from convention is either sustainable or unsustainable. Sustainable deviation is supported by wide-ranging continued use and, like certain invention, goes on to become convention of its own. Unsustainable deviation is typically very localized to the extent of being entirely individual and it cannot support meaning beyond its immediate use. This kind of deviation has traditionally been described as 'error'. It is more accurate and more helpful for students to think of their writing as needing to sustain meaning and to help them do so as intentionally as possible, whether it is to continue within the bounds of convention or to be stylistically inventive. Writing within convention is not unthinking as there are countless meaningful uses of language that require imagination without subverting convention. Students need to be familiar with convention because they

need to know what they are doing should they deviate from it. Whatever they do in their writing must support meaning.

## **Application**

The considerations described below under 'Writing Community' are presented to students at the beginning of the year for them to paste into their books. They are the terms of the writing culture that teachers set out to foster in their classrooms and as such this document should become redundant as students become used to talking about Context, Audience, Purpose and Style ('CAPS', if you will). When teachers comment on their students' work, they use these headings with the associated questions as guides to describe what they perceive in the students writing.

For each consideration, there are diagrams provided that represent visually what the evaluator perceives in the written work. In the cases of context and style, there are numerical measures indicated and the diagrams are as descriptive as they are evaluative. They are not meant to provide exact numbers but rather an overall sense of how aware the student is of writing according to the considerations and to what degree he has accomplished this in his writing. Their most important use is in prompting reflection (writer alone) and discussion (writer and reader). Their representation of what writer, reader or both are thinking helps generate discussion. In the cases of audience and purpose, they are purely descriptive, offering an opportunity for the student writer to compare her intention with the perception of the evaluator-reader.

The imperative throughout is not to generate numbers but to discuss the writing in language and with imagery that is common and helpful to the student writer. This can be described as descriptive evaluation. The fact that there is overlap between considerations is not a problem, as they are not intended to be disconnected measures but ways of looking at the same thing. Furthermore, the fact that every

consideration is represented does not mean that every consideration needs to be evaluated for every piece of writing. A legend to the diagrams is provided below.

University of Cape Town

## Talking about a

# Writing Community

These are the questions that you need to ask about your writing and which your teacher is going to answer in evaluating your writing. Do not simply answer 'Yes' or 'No'. You need to be aware of these considerations as you write and do all that you can to accomplish what you are aware of trying to do.

### CONTEXT (defined and loose roles)

Writer

- Are you aware of stepping into a role as you write?
- Are you free to write as whatever character you choose?

Audience

- Does your writing allow your readers to respond in a number of different ways or does it prescribe quite specifically how they should respond?

### AUDIENCE (internal and external)

- Are you likely to receive one, a few or many kinds of response to your work?
- Who is most likely to agree with or enjoy your writing?
- Who is most likely to disagree with or not enjoy your writing?

### PURPOSE (material, aesthetic and intellectual)

- What physical actions do you want in response to your writing?
- What feelings do you want your writing to prompt?
- What ideas and/or information are you trying to discuss or debate?

### STYLE (convention, invention)

Convention

- What **structure** (if any) does your writing need to follow?
- What **words** are you unsure of?

- What **punctuation** marks have you used?
- (prose) Do your **sentences** all make sense?
- (prose) Does it make sense where you have **paragraphed** your writing?

#### Invention

- What **words** could you include or take out to make your writing more effective?
- What **punctuation** mark/s that you haven't used might you be able to include?
- (prose) Do your **sentences** need to be similar in length and structure or do you need to vary them?
- (poetry) What difference (if any) do the lengths of your **lines** make to your poem?
- (prose) Do your **paragraphs** need to be similar in length and structure or do you need to vary them?
- (poetry) What difference (if anything) does your **stanzafication** (or lack thereof) make to your poem?
- How have you used **idiom** to express what you want to say?
- How have you used **figures of speech** to express what you want to say?



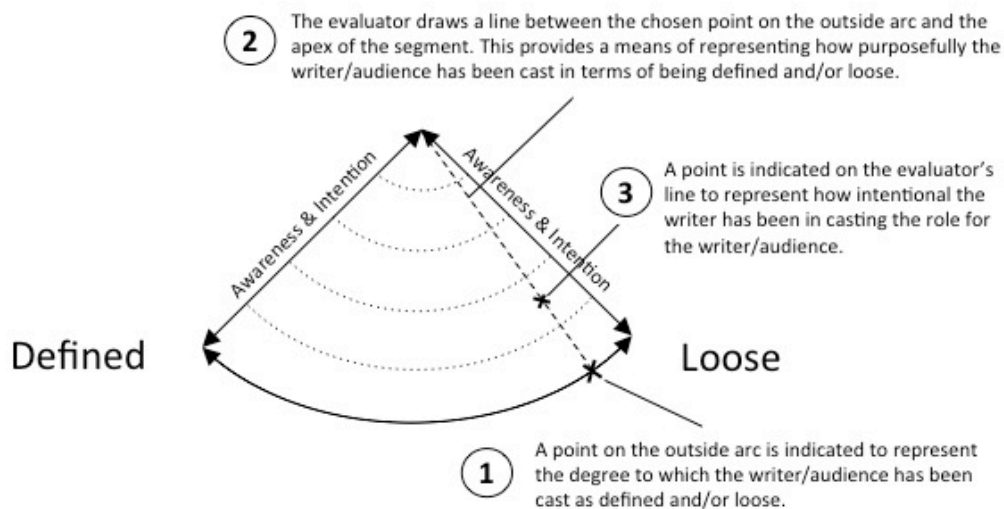


## Legend: Writing evaluation

### CONTEXT

For both writer and audience, the evaluator indicates on the outer edge of the arc the degree to which the roles for each are defined or loose. The concentric arcs indicate to what degree the writer has been aware and intentional of casting himself and his reader into these roles. The further towards the outer arc, the greater the perceived level of awareness and intentionality.

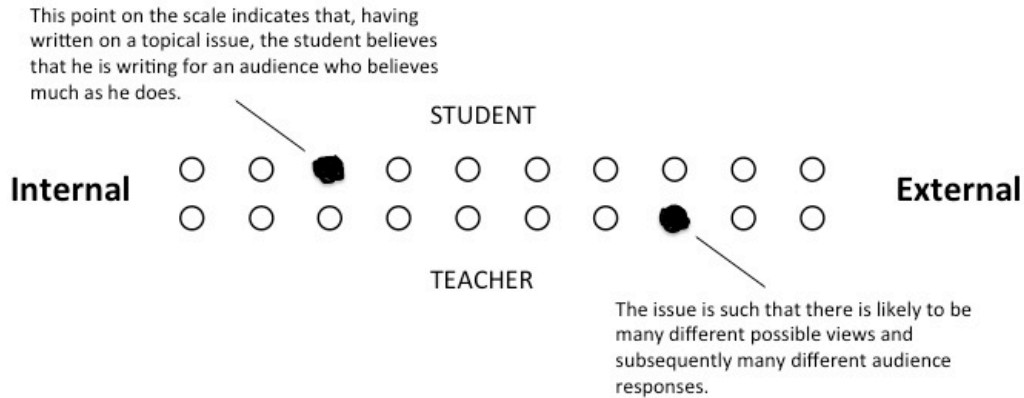
For example:



### AUDIENCE

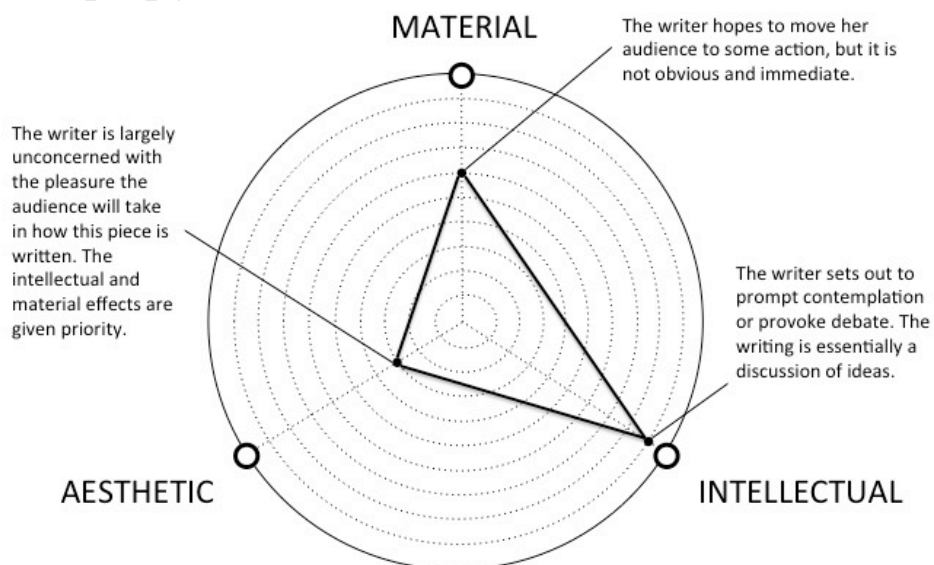
This allows for both student and teacher to enter values for purpose of comparison. The scales presented indicate the relative predominance of one or the other audience consideration. In other words, it represents the degree to which the audience is assumed and congruent or unpredictable and differentiated.

**For example:**



**PURPOSE**

This form of evaluation requires the evaluator to consider the respective strengths of the material, aesthetic and intellectual purposes of the writing. These are represented by plotting a point for each purpose on the line radiating from the centre to its point on the circumference. The circumference of the circle indicates greatest strength while the centre point indicates a theoretical absence. When both teacher and student have plotted their points and drawn the resultant triangles, the area of overlap can provide further means for discussion and reflection.



## STYLE

There are two tables with five elements of style represented. The first table indicates to what extent the writer has unconsciously deviated from convention for each element. This is represented by a vertical line in each corresponding row. The second table indicates to what extent the writer has consciously deviated from convention. In each table, the chief concern is meaning and the degree to which conscious and unconscious deviation support, inhibit or create meaning. The evaluator has to discern to what extent deviation from convention is an intentional and successful attempt to make meaning. The first table represents accurate subscription to convention. The second table represents knowing and effective use or subversion of convention.

**For example:**

This student makes frequent spelling errors.

This student's punctuation is not consistent and renders the writing difficult to follow in a number of places.

The student varies his paragraph length well to emphasise his . . .

**DEVIATION**

**CONVENTION**

structure	
words	
punctuation	
sentences	
paragraphs	

structure	
words	
punctuation	
sentences / lines	
paragraphs / stanzas	
idiom	
figures of speech	

**CONVENTION**

**INVENTION**

In a covering letter for a CV, the student has observed the conventions of layout with a few minor deviations.

Despite his spelling, he has a fairly wide vocabulary which he uses to reasonable effect.

## NUMERICAL EVALUATION

The number values in the table represent fixed percentages and do not allow for finer discrimination. This is not meant to be an exhaustive rendering of each part of the writing into the level of minute detail occasioned by individual percentage points. Rather, it is meant to represent fairly broad levels of writing ability that can be generally identified. This only works on the basis of the recognition that writing outside of school is never evaluated at the level of percentage points and the conviction that numerical evaluation provides an indication not a determination of the quality of a piece of writing. Evaluation in terms of individual percentage points assumes a level of objectivity and measurability that cannot be obtained.

The levels of value are without correlating explanations. Again, it is the student writer's developing ability to discern what a 55 or a 85 might signify that is most important. Where a teacher assigns one of these number values it is on the assumption that it is accompanied by explanation. The most that can be indicated here is that a piece of writing given a 35 does not achieve anything meaningful as written language, and that a piece of writing given a 95 indicates the furthest reaches of what can be expected from a student writer. A 95 signifies properly mature writing. The number values given in each of the four considerations (context, audience, purpose and style) provide the basis for an overall figure.

Context	Audience	Purpose	Style	Overall
35	35	35	35	35
45	45	45	45	45
55	55	55	55	55
65	65	65	65	65
75	75	75	75	75
85	85	85	85	85
95	95	95	95	95

# Conclusion

## Chapter 8

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A great irony of this thesis is the fact that I am writing about writing. As I have been researching and considering the range of ideas about writing and how it is taught, I have had to put my own education in writing into practice and I have had ample opportunity to observe in great depth how writing actually happens for at least one person, namely myself. I remember enjoying writing at school, particularly of the more narrative or descriptive sort, but I remember precious little of how I was instructed in this. I received a very decent secondary education, came first in my grade for Matric English, studied English for four years as part of an honours degree and one year as part of my teaching certificate, and have taught English as a full-time teacher for six-and-a-half years. I am not exceptional, but I think I fall quite squarely into the bracket of those people who should be able to write confidently and competently in English. I really have no excuse.

It's still hard.

The ideas come and go, the words swirl across and off my computer screen. I don't know where to start, then when I do, I don't know how to end. I feel triumphant. I feel overwhelmed. There is the exhilaration of punching out 1,500 words at a sitting and the despair of eking out 150 in a day. At certain points I have had to abandon the keyboard for the tactile imagination of pen on paper, while throughout I have marvelled that anyone could write something of this length without the benefit of digital editing. I have written some real rubbish along the way towards writing quality, and some of it still makes me cringe. I have tracked my word count as slavishly as any of my students and fretted over feedback with their same angst.

And I have come to the realization that I have a lot to learn about what learning to write well is *really* like for my students and a lot to learn about how to interact

with them on their own journeys of writing discovery. What can I possibly do with or for them that will stick? What will help them to find that motivation to write and to experience the thrill of putting down words in which they can find pleasure and power? Where do any of us as teachers and curriculum-writers feature in the serendipity of their writing experience?

These are questions that I have attempted to answer in this dissertation, and in the process I have realised at least two things: first, the *how* of teaching writing has to be worked out by the individual teacher in his classroom as he seeks to create a writing community in his classroom; second, although I am still vexed by these same questions as I try to develop writing communities in my classroom, I feel more equipped now to more frequently answer these questions imaginatively, confidently and effectively with the students and their writing before me.

Determinist claims regarding the teaching of writing cannot be taken at face value. We still don't have a model of exactly how anyone thinks when he or she writes, and I doubt we ever will. There is no definitive way to teach writing and no guarantee that we can make a good writer out of anyone. However, the research and theorizing of the last fifty years have provided a number of compelling insights into what factors help student writers develop towards being mature writers. The conclusion of James Britton and others that teachers need insight into their students' development is essential. The teaching of writing is about paying attention to what students are *actually* writing and not about telling them to measure up to what they *should* be writing. Britton and other theorists such as Donald Graves, Janet Emig and Mina Shaughnessy made it clear that teachers should seek to understand why students write what they do and to engage with them as they do it. In this sense, scholars like Thomas Kent and Gary Olson who warn not to insist on a single model of writing and writing methodology are quite congruent with these theorists. The teaching of writing takes time, engagement and insight. It cannot be taught at a distance.

A further implication of this is that writing is not simply a collection of established skills that can be systematically transmitted as content. Error in writing is not simply corrected by application to the 'right' rule. Frank Smith's explanation of convention is crucial as a reminder that language is always in flux and that what is ultimately at stake is meaning. Writing is an act of making meaning and the conventions of language exist to facilitate meaning between writer and reader. The teaching of writing is not about making sure that students are following the rules but about helping them to understand how every element of language – diction, punctuation, sentence structure and so on – operates to create and shape meaning.

Writing cannot be taught as an ancillary activity in English. The possibilities that writing offers for students to reflect on their uses of language are too rich and varied to be fitted in as and where other activities in the curriculum allow. The recognition by the National Writing Project of the importance of writing across the educational spectrum is significant, as is its success in pursuing this as the informing principle for its activities. The NWP offers a compelling picture of how government officials, academics and schools can work together to offer teachers the resources that they need to keep their thinking about teaching writing current and fruitful. While the NWP is concerned with writing across the curriculum and not just in English, its principles of research-led and collaborative practice present a vision for the kinds of relationships and conversations that English teachers should foster across schools and tertiary institutions. What is plain is that the lone English teacher constantly trying to inspire and improve student writing from his limited bank of experience and education is not a model that should be perpetuated.

I have a better understanding now of why writing matters in my English class. It matters *because it is writing*. It is an act of creation, reflection, relationship, rigour and discovery, and as it provides students the opportunity to engage in these, we should give them every opportunity to write. It is my role as teacher to think carefully through how often and on what occasions my students write. It is my role to foster a community in which students are used to writing and reading

each other's writing. The culture of this community is one in which writing is a challenge but not a chore, a way of using language with which they feel increasingly confident and competent. The idea of a writing community takes me away from teaching and evaluating writing from a distance and requires me to interact with my students as they write, offering me the thrill of seeing them discover how language works. It pushes me to rediscover the power and pleasure of writing and to share this with them as a living, abiding reality and not as something I once did long ago, dimly remembered in the content that I teach them.

So it is that I emerge from this study with an approach to teaching writing that is responsive to the following influences: the aesthetic imperative of Holbrook, Abbs, Thompson and Whitehead; the developmental insights of Britton; the practical implications of process theory; the caveats of post-process scholarship; the priority given to professionalism by the NWP. I have a renewed passion for writing in my language and an imagination refreshed for how I might pass this on to my students. I am convinced that we need to make writing central to teaching English and that this needs to be entrusted to a body of truly professional teachers and not a curriculum that presents writing as formulae and teachers as messengers.

# Appendix

## Student A

5. Final work

Secrets can cause problems

\* [Secrets can break up a friendship] Secrets can break up a family. [Secrets can cause problems in a relationship, but most of all secrets can cause you\* to lie.]

To keep secrets from your best friend, family members or partner is dangerous. You can easily cause issues between each other.

If you keep a secret from your best friends and you know it will hurt their feelings, rather tell them yourself then let them find out by someone else.

The ~~res~~ reason why I say secrets can cause lies, is because when you try to hide something and that person you trying to hide it from almost found out, what do you do? You lie to \*convince them that it's not true. All of us have secrets, so stop trying to hide it by lying, because it will kill you more than it will\* kill the other person.

tense

You would also ~~have~~ live your life based on a lie. So stop lying and tell the truth. Talk to someone about your secret. It will really help. It will calm your mind, you would be less under stress and you won't feel so guilty.

If you keep a secret from your family it's a different story. That one secret can break your family

✓

SS

\* CA

S (words)

S (sentences)

up, but it also depends on what type of ~~secret~~ secret it is. If you keep a secret from your ~~family's~~ family's religion then that can be a big problem. Like maybe one of the children in the family was adopted and no one new,\* it can cause issues. If it's like a secret that someone drove over your dog by accident then it's not that bad. So much damage would not be done.

\*5  
(words)

The same with romantic relationships, you have to trust your partner with your secrets and if you lie, you might end up being divorced. So this is my story  
~~So~~ stop keeping secrets and stop lying.

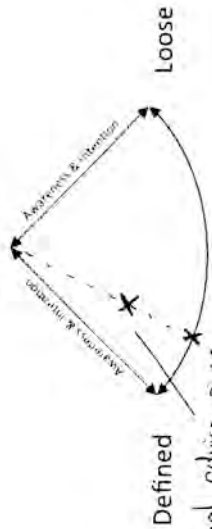
C  
(writer)

2) Total words: 307

# Writing Evaluation

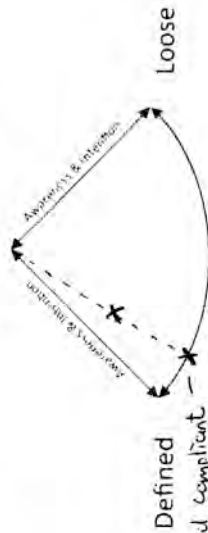
## CONTEXT

### Writer



Professional advice-giver  
Story-teller? "This is  
my story."

### Audience



Captive and compliant  
audience

## COMMENTS

You write in a manner similar to an opinion columnist in a magazine. You give your advice confidently and your reader is cast in the role as someone who needs to listen to your advice. Your expectation is that they will heed what you have to say.

## AUDIENCE

### STUDENT

Internal           External

### TEACHER

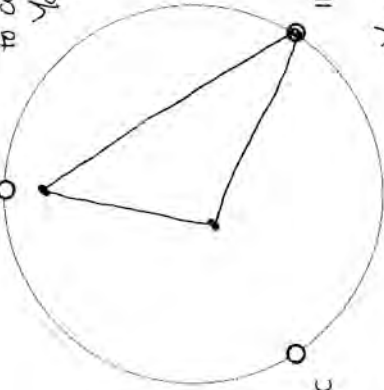
## COMMENTS

You anticipate a high level of agreement because you imagine an audience who thinks similarly to you.

## PURPOSE

### MATERIAL

You want your reader to act differently. You speak imperatively e.g. "stop", "trust".



### AESTHETIC

You get straight to the point.

### INTELLECTUAL

You are challenging your audience's thinking.

## STYLE

structure
words
punctuation
sentences
paragraphs

### DEVIATION

Your tense is not consistent.

### CONVENTION

structure
words
punctuation
sentences / lines
paragraphs / stanzas
idiom
figures of speech

### CONVENTION

### INVENTION

Varied sentence length, particularly in the beginning.

### COMMENTS

You write confidently and persuasively.

## Numerical Evaluation

Where numerical evaluation is necessary, use the increments in this table to indicate percentages.

Context	Audience	Purpose	Style	Overall
35	35	35	35	35
45	45	45	45	45
55	55	55	55	55
65	65	65	65	65
75	75	75	75	75
85	85	85	85	85
95	95	95	95	95

### COMMENTS

## Student B

### A lonely day:

- A lonely day was just one of those days for most people. like

"Hey John what you do yesterday"

"Oh nothing much, just sat at home"

"Want to do something today?"

"Sure."

Well for me those days used to come, and stay. Because those days used to be everyday.

\* S  
(punctuation)  
(punctuation)

You see I'm an only child, my days used to start out waking up early and playing with my toys till the birds started chirping. Then I would go to my ~~room~~ parents room demanding breakfast. I'd be greeted with hugs and kisses and a lovely warm smile. I would sit at the dining room table waiting while my mom made breakfast. A huge wooden table crafted with the uttermost skill. A tall ~~for~~ vase filled with bright and ~~ex~~ tropical flowers, <sup>grand</sup> 10 chairs surrounded the table, but only one was filled. The rest of the day was ~~at~~ entertained by toys and playing outside battling creatures with eight eyes and two heads. but only one heart.

172 But soon even my imaginary friends grew ~~bea~~ bored. And i spent the day alone.

As i grew older I discovered alot of boys I went to school with lived in the same neighbourhood. one, two, three, four and five and as the older i ~~go~~ became the further i traveled until I'd fished out every friend in the concrete jungle known as Rondebosch. Cold rainy days were spent inside watching action movies eating pizza. Hot days were spent playing soccer till we drop <sup>ped</sup> down and couldn't anymore.

\*5  
(words)

And now lonely days came and <sup>go</sup> went but only when i wanted. I'd wake up late mom and dad had gone for a walk. I would have breakfast, usually pizza from the night before, followed by cereal. I'd climb back in bed and by the time mom and dad returned still in bed. I'd say "Yah, Yah you can go out I'll probably play soccer later"

\*5  
(words)

Two hours later mom calls:

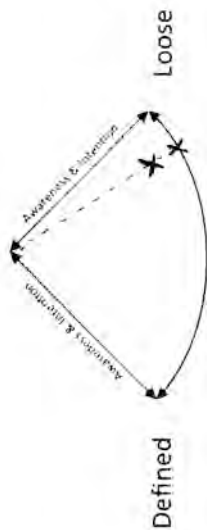
"Yah, ~~the~~ i'm going to go out later"  
and just i see that the day passed by.

Words. 329

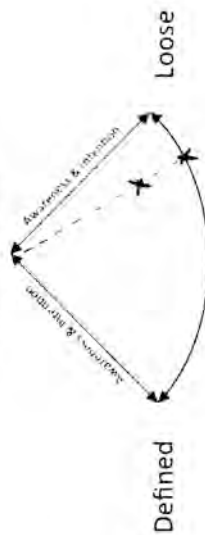
# Writing Evaluation

## CONTEXT

### Writer



### Audience



COMMENTS You seem to be writing very much as yourself (autobiographically). You are not obviously trying to imagine yourself in a defined role. Your audience is free to respond as they want to, although you are showing something quite personal, so it is likely you would want a favourable response.

## AUDIENCE

### STUDENT

Internal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
External	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

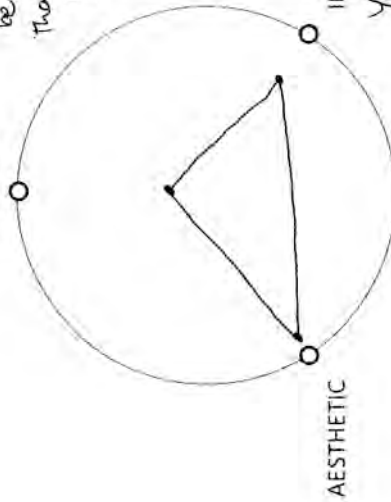
### TEACHER

COMMENTS You want a sympathetic audience. You are writing about yourself in a way that suggests that you expect your audience to know what it mobbing you.

## PURPOSE

### MATERIAL

There doesn't seem to be an obvious action that you want to provoke.



You explore what it means to be lonely.

## Numerical Evaluation

Where numerical evaluation is necessary, use the increments in this table to indicate percentages.

Context	Audience	Purpose	Style	Overall
35	35	35	35	35
45	45	45	45	45
55	55	55	55	55
65	65	65	65	65
75	75	75	75	75
85	85	85	85	85
95	95	95	95	95

COMMENTS

## STYLE

DEVIATION	CONVENTION
structure	
words	
punctuation	
sentences	
paragraphs	

direct speech

CONVENTION

CONVENTION	INVENTION
structure	
words	
punctuation	
sentences / lines	
paragraphs / stanzas	
idiom	
figures of speech	

INVENTION

lovely subversion of idiom  
pragmatic imagery in second paragraph

COMMENTS

You manage to capture something not only about loneliness but also about growing up and how it changes the way you see the world.

## Student C

### Final

Kelly and I were going out for about a year and a half in February. We met in University, but we weren't such close friends in 1st and 2nd year. In the third year we were invited to a friends party. We started chatting, then started chatting at university and hanging out together.

We were such close friends in third year, so I decided I <sup>was</sup> am going to man up and ask her out next year. After the holidays were started catching so I decided to ask her out.

\*5  
(Sentences)

A few days later she gave me the answer I was looking for up close - She said, "Yes". I told all my friends in class and all my girlfriends friends. We were on a couple of dates already, until our friends also got boyfriends and girlfriends. Then we started going out with our friends and their there partners.

\*5  
(Words)

Our favourite restaurant to go out with our friends was at Spur and especially on a Monday because you get a burger free. On our first year ~~at~~ anniversary I decided to spoil Kelly to a picnic in Kirstenbosch.

After our lovely, amazing and <sup>memorable</sup> remembarabal ~~scenes~~ occasion we packed away all the food and cutlery, while walking through the park on our way to the car, we saw an amazing view.

The amazing view was looking onto Table Mountain.

We put the picnic bag in the boot and sat down on a majestic looking rock, waiting for the sun to set.

It was getting dark and we were driving on our way home. There was a stationary car in the middle of the left lane, so I ~~swerved~~ swerved to the right which was a big mistake because I turned right very hard and tumbled off down off the road.

Climax  
(Structure)



## Numerical Evaluation

Where numerical evaluation is necessary, use the increments in this table to indicate percentages.

Context	Audience	Purpose	Style	Overall
35	35	35	35	35
45	45	45	45	45
55	55	55	55	55
65	65	65	65	65
75	75	75	75	75
85	85	85	85	85
95	95	95	95	95

COMMENTS

## STYLE

STYLE	
<b>DEVIATION</b> climax and conclusion	structure
	words
	punctuation
	sentences
<b>CONVENTION</b>	
<b>CONVENTION</b>	structure
	words
	punctuation
	sentences / lines
	paragraphs / stanzas
	idiom
<b>INVENTION</b>	
figures of speech	

COMMENTS A conventional or typical short story is focused on a specific climax, a moment of greatest drama or excitement towards which the rest of the story builds. You finish your story with a dramatic moment, but you only give it two sentences. It catches the reader by surprise and seems almost not to matter because it is over so quickly.

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